

ERWIN STRITTMATTER IN REFERENCE TO  
THE AGRARIAN NOVEL OF THE  
NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

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A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE

OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN GERMAN

IN THE

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

BY

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1978

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### ABSTRACT

This study deals with two aspects of German literature: the agrarian novel from the early nineteenth century to National Socialism, and a comparison of capitalist and socialist ideology, using the works of the DDR author Erwin Strittmatter.

In the first part of the thesis, chosen works are analysed with the aim of establishing a pattern of bourgeois idealism and of tracing its development in reference to the changing historical background. The political implications of the nationalist transformation and radicalisation of the conservative agrarian ideology, which grew up as a middle-class reaction to the emergence of modern industrial Germany, are illustrated by the combination of the heroic and the idyllic in fascist literature.

The second part deals with the socialist agrarian novel, which is discussed, in the light of Marxist theory, as a departure from the conservative model, and in relation to different political ideals and objectives. Three agrarian novels of Erwin Strittmatter - Ochsenkutscher, Tinko and Ole Bienkopp - are examined in detail as the basis for contrast with capitalist doctrine and for observations on the role of literature in the DDR.

The concluding chapter illustrates how, in the established East German state of the 1960's, the disregard for the demands of authority, which is a feature of Strittmatter's Ole Bienkopp, indicates a return to the traditional pattern of bourgeois idealism within the confines of socialist morality.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the following people for their willing assistance:

The University Grants Committee, for providing the funds which made this study possible.

Professor Edward Carter and Professor Dr Gerhard Neumann, for their useful advice and pertinent suggestions.

The University Library staff of Erlangen and Christchurch, for their co-operation in locating research material.

Dr Jörg Bilke, for the use of his personal archives.

Val Goulding, for accurate and speedy typing.

## INTRODUCTION

As opposed to purely exploratory studies, this dissertation sets out from the ideological assumptions of chosen works to prove a thesis, concentrating on content and ideas rather than style. The method is one of comparison, within the genre of the agrarian novel, of the bourgeois presentation of the farmer with that under socialism, using typical works as illustration. The approach I have chosen is selective rather than comprehensive.

Both the confines of my study and the relative obscurity of the novels and their authors have necessitated, on the one hand, the analysis of individual works rather than an author's total output, and on the other, where relevant, a certain amount of biographical information on the writers and an indication of the essential characteristics of their works.

In the important process of selecting representative novels to illustrate significant changes in ideology and values, I have been assisted chiefly by two critical works. Peter Zimmermann's Der Bauernroman. Antifeudalismus-Konservatismus-Faschismus (1975) is the first extensive and detailed historical analysis of the ideology of the agrarian novel in Germany from the early nineteenth century up till National Socialism. While isolated studies have appeared on related topics - realism, the idyll, "Trivialliteratur", "Heimatkunst", and "Völkische Ideologie" among others - Zimmermann combines the different aspects of the subject into a coherent, convincing and authoritative examination of the agrarian novel within its historical context.

The second main critical work is Gudrun Kühn's dissertation from the DDR, Welt und Gestalt des Bauern in der deutschsprachigen

Literatur. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Epik seit dem 18.

Jahrhundert (1970), which, while admirable in the scope of its analysis, suffers from the author's attempt to cover too much material. As a result, her conclusions arise at times less from detailed, constructed argument than from assumptions and preconceptions. Her work, however, gives especially useful information and insights on the development of socialist agrarian literature from its beginnings to the present.

The agrarian novel is characterised throughout by a strong didactic element which is often reflected in an almost primitive manipulation of character and situation and gives rise to the inferior quality of many works. This observation leads to the problem of realism. The question of authenticity in the construction of character, in the depiction of social background and in the perception of historical processes is closely linked with the appeal and popularity of the work, the type of reading public, and above all with the effect of setting values and of creating stereotypes as a reflection of attitudes and conventions in the respective historical context.

In my analysis I shall be concerned with the development of a false middle-class consciousness as a response to the social and economic upheaval attendant upon the modernisation of Germany, and with the construction of a national ideology, as reflected in the agrarian novel through the formation of character and the process of socialisation. The bourgeois depiction of the farmer as a symbolic identification figure and the portrayal of the heroic confrontation between the individual and the historical forces of industrial capitalism in the second half of the nineteenth century

and into the twentieth, had important implications in respect to the constitution of society and to political authority. We shall see, above all, how in Gustav Frenssen's Jörn Uhl bourgeois conventions and assumptions are moulded into a national ideology and how the agrarian novel becomes a vehicle for the enlistment of the citizen for the state.

The shift from bourgeois to socialist realism involves significant changes in ideals and sympathies, as illustrated in the works of Adam Scharrer and Erwin Strittmatter.

Just as I examine the bourgeois novel by a study of individual authors and works, so the analysis of the agrarian novel in East Germany is restricted, for the sake of expediency, to one representative author: Erwin Strittmatter. While Strittmatter's first work, Ochsenkutscher, belongs to the same anti-fascist category of literature as Scharrer's writing, Tinko exemplifies the role of the agrarian novel as the tool of political indoctrination for socialism. Ole Bienkopp, which marks the culmination of my study, reveals a re-interpretation of bourgeois values according to socialist ideals: a similar presentation of the individual's role in society against the historical background not of advancing capitalism, but of developing socialism, and a similar inculcation of conformity and acceptance through the political appeal to fundamental socialist values in the construction of socialism and in service to the state.

## JEREMIAS GOTTHELF

Together with the "Oberhof" episode of Karl Immermann's Münchhausen (1838), in which the isolated Westfalian farming world of the independent Hofschulze, resting on the powers of tradition and property and founded on toil and a veneration for the ancient social hierarchy, is set against a degenerate nobility and a superficial "Zeitgeist", the works of the Swiss pastor, Jeremias Gotthelf (1797-1854), mark, for Peter Zimmermann, the transition from a progressive to a conservative presentation of the farmer<sup>1</sup>. However, while Immermann's conception of a static rural world as the source of national regeneration anticipates the ideologically overladen agrarian literature of the late nineteenth century, Gotthelf carries problems of general social relevance into the countryside. The Emmental becomes the scene for the struggle between the individual and an increasingly problematic society. His works establish values and thematic patterns which, ideological transformations notwithstanding, can be regarded as definitive for the traditional agrarian novel, and for this reason they make an appropriate starting-point for this study.

Although Albert Bitzius<sup>2</sup> was born into an educated upper-class family in Bern, Switzerland, he soon came into contact with the farming community when his father was appointed a country pastor.

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1 Peter Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman. Antifeudalismus-Konservatismus - Faschismus (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1975), p.36 ff.

2 Bitzius first assumed the pseudonym "Jeremias Gotthelf" in Der Bauernspiegel (1837).



After theological studies he became curate, first in Herzogenbuchsee, later in Bern, and finally in Lützelflüh where he remained from 1831 till the end of his life. Here he was politically and socially active, especially in the care of the poor and, as school commissioner, in educational matters.

The source of the regional inspiration in Gotthelf's works is to be found not merely in his professional, but even more in his political career. A short sketch of his political development illustrates the degree to which his works reflect his changing attitude to contemporary events.

At first Gotthelf took the stand of a moderate liberal in the democratic movements of the 1820's: the demand for equal rights for the rural and urban population, attacks on the privileges of the conservative aristocracy, and calls for general education reform, especially in country areas. The first novels, Der Bauernspiegel (1837) and Leiden und Freuden eines Schulmeisters (1839), in which he advocates the reform of the care of the underprivileged and the improvement of the education system through Christian instruction, give evidence of Gotthelf's early interest in social questions. With these works he belongs to the tradition of the didactic and humanist writings of Heinrich Zschokke (1771-1848) and Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827).

From about 1830, however, the growing radicalism of the liberal movement and the self-seeking of ambitious politicians drove the socially progressive yet politically increasingly conservative Gotthelf into political isolation:

"Sein wach gewordener Sinn für Freiheit und soziale Gerechtigkeit hinderte ihn, in den Schoß des wenn nicht reaktionär doch konservativ gerichteten

bernischen Bürgertums, dem er entstammte, zurückzu-  
kehren, aber seine urtümliche, von religiösen  
Bindungen primärster Art getragene Glaubensordnung  
hielt ihn davon ab, der politischen Emanzipations-  
bewegung bedenkenlos zuzustimmen".<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly his novels of the 1840's reflect a growing concern at the  
secular, materialist character of the emancipatory movements and an  
aversion to political life as such.

While the shortcomings of the Emmental rural society -  
ignorance, indifference and injustice - are exposed to criticism in  
the early novels, this same society is idealised in Wie Uli der  
Knecht glücklich wird (1841)<sup>4</sup> and Uli der Pächter (1847) as the model  
Christian community. The solution to social problems lies here not  
in political measures but in religious and ethical responsibility.

In his later works, Zeitgeist und Berner Geist (1849) and  
Erlebnisse eines Schuldenbauers (1852), Gotthelf's opposition to the  
pervasive secular spirit of his time, especially in its political  
manifestations, becomes bitter and uncompromising. Zeitgeist und  
Berner Geist is, like the early works, accusing, but here sets the  
"Berner Geist", the ethos embodied by the conservative Bernese farmer -  
social stability, moral order and respect for tradition - against the  
subversive influence of radical politics:

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3 Karl Fehr, Jeremias Gotthelf (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlags-  
buchhandlung, 1967), p.33.

4 In relation to Uli der Knecht, whose subtitle "Eine Gabe für  
Dienstboten und Meisterleute" indicates that the author  
expressly meant this work to be read by a rural public, the  
question of the reception of Gotthelf's works acquires special  
relevance, yet it is doubtful whether circumstances allowed  
the popularity of this or any other of his works to spread  
beyond urban circles. See: Friedrich Sengle, "Wunschbild Land  
und Schreckbild Stadt. Zu einem zentralen Thema der neueren  
deutschen Literatur". Studium Generale 16, Heft 10, 1963,  
pp. 619-631. Also: Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman, pp. 22-24.

"In der Unverstörbarkeit des naturhaften bäuerlichen Volksethos und des christlichen Glaubens hielt Gotthelf Sicherungen gegen die Politisierung des Denkens, die Auflösung der ständischen Ordnungen, die Subjektivierung der Lebensbedingungen, die Relativierung der Sitten und Werte fest." <sup>5</sup>

Gotthelf's two "Uli" novels, free from the outspoken social criticism of the earlier, and the polemic of the later novels, are the clearest declaration of the author's philosophy and provide the key to an understanding of his thinking. These novels, which together follow the moral and material rise of an inconspicuous farm-labourer, conform to the tradition of the "Bildungsroman". They can be divided into three sections: Uli's experiences as servant, head-servant, and tenant-farmer (the fourth and final stage, as fully-fledged land-owner, is anticipated at the conclusion of Uli der Pächter ). The development of his personality is followed through these stages and we see how he encounters and comes to terms with the different problems posed by each new situation. The link between action and character development is related to the allegorical nature of the plot which exemplifies the process of Christian education.

In the service of the Bodenbauer Uli, through the wise counsel of his master, gives up, after inner struggles, his dissolute life, and earns respect in the community by thrift and hard work. His ambitions for a position of greater responsibility are furthered by his master's selfless intervention and he soon finds himself head-servant on the Glungge, the farm of Joggeli, the Bodenbauer's cousin. The disorder on the property, the laziness of the undisciplined servants, and the distrust and resentment which his obvious capability

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5 Fritz Martini, Deutsche Literatur im bürgerlichen Realismus 1848-1898 (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1962), p.460.

brings from his new master present fresh tests for his personality. He learns to master the difficulties of leadership and to assume the responsibility of management, a task which demands perseverance and a strong will.

In the private sphere, too, he has obstacles to overcome. He is almost tempted by the prospect of easy wealth to marry Elisi, his employer's spoilt and superficial daughter, but he and Vreneli, a poor yet noble maid, discover their hidden feelings for each other and Joggeli, shamelessly exploited by his son and son-in-law, incarnations of the corrupt "Zeitgeist", entrusts Uli with the tenancy of the farm.

Uli der Pächter describes the further struggles of the Christian on the path towards the right life, here not only in the sphere of work but also in the family context, for Uli now assumes the roles of husband and farmer. As tenant-farmer he faces new challenges, for a compulsive desire for gain dominates his thinking and threatens his marriage. A prosperous first year has brought out greed and miserliness in his personality which cause him to neglect his family and reputation. A spiritual crisis and impending ruin brought about by the devastation of his crops and the auction of the farm prepare, however, the way for a change of fortune. They are rescued by the appearance of the misanthrope Hagelhans, a rich relative of Vreneli, who buys the property, reinstates Uli, and brings the promise of wealth for the resurrected couple.

The plot thus illustrates how Uli's struggle for material existence and social advancement symbolises the Christian's path to grace. The search for the true Christian life is here projected into the agrarian sphere and Gotthelf constructs from a code of Christian ethics a set of practical farming virtues.

The message of this "Bauernchristentum"<sup>6</sup> is that Uli cannot become a good farmer without God. His sin is that he forgets he is dependent on God's law. He has lost the humility of the true Christian when material considerations take precedence over spiritual concerns. As tenant-farmer Uli, elated by initial success, becomes obsessed with the ambition to become rich as quickly as possible. He employs fresh servants in an attempt to reduce costs and hopes to hold the traditional harvest feast with the minimum expense. It is this self-centredness which separates him from God:

"Bei jeglicher Sünde, und namentlich, wenn jemand sein Handeln nicht durch Gott und sein Wort bestimmen läßt, sondern durch sein eigen Fleisch und Blut oder andere Kreaturen, ist der Mensch immer gottlos, und in dem Sinn war es Uli auch oft, und je länger je öfter."<sup>7</sup>

In a further sense, too, the situation of the farmer is compared with that of the Christian. The farmer's dependence on nature, founded on the knowledge that the productivity of the land is the source of his livelihood, is an illustration of Man's dependence on God. Not chance but God's will determines his fate, through nature which is God's creation. Joggeli resentfully attributes Uli's success in his first year on the Glungge to selfishness, but the author points out that it is the hand of God which controls the seasons and ultimately decides the fate of the farmer:

"Der arme Joggeli bedachte nicht, daß säen und wässern der Mensch kann, aber nicht das Gedeihen geben. Ob dicht oder dünn das Korn auf dem Acker steht, ob aufrecht oder ob es auf dem Boden liegt, das ist Gottes Sache. Wer es zu treffen wußte allezeit, wußte, ob viel oder wenig säen gut sei, ein kalter Winter käme oder ein

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6 See: Ernst Bloch, "Hebel, Gotthelf und Bäurisches Tao," in: E.B., Literarische Aufsätze [Gesamtausgabe Vol.9] (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1965), pp.365-384.

7 Jeremias Gotthelf, Uli der Pächter [Die Hauptwerke Vol.5] (Erlenbach-Zürich: Eugen Rentsch, 1962), pp.183-184.

milder, der wäre eben ein Hexenmeister, aber solchen gibt es nicht; es ist ein einziger, der dieses weiß, und der ist eben der, der kalte oder milde Winter macht, und der ist Gott."<sup>8</sup>

The interplay of the characters plays an important role in the development of Gotthelf's farming hero, for they are so constructed as to appeal to the positive or negative sides of his personality. Uli is characterised by an absence of moral conviction and of independence of judgement which means that his decisions are formed not from his own deliberations but in response to the influence of persons around him. He fluctuates between good and evil:

"Es kam ihm vor, als ob da zwei Mächte sich um seine Seele stritten, fast gleichsam ein guter und ein böser Engel, und jeder ihn haben wollte."<sup>9</sup>

On the one hand he lends an ear to the malicious advice of Joggeli and allows himself to be exploited by ~~the~~ unscrupulous innkeeper and miller. On the other hand he is guided by the wisdom of the Bodenbauer and later by his wife Vreneli, positive influences on Uli who lead him towards self-reliance and a Christian life. Uli's indecisiveness in moral matters gives his struggle symbolic value for, in his human frailty, he stands for Man himself. His struggle between good and evil - a theme central to Gotthelf's works - represents the human condition.

In accordance with the allegorical pattern of these works Providence - divine intervention - serves the author's didactic intention as an ultimate moral authority and corrective of personality. Gotthelf does not distinguish between temporal and spiritual values but constructs, by the example of the farmer, a

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8 Gotthelf, Uli der Pächter, p.26.

9 Jeremias Gotthelf, Wie Uli der Knecht glücklich wird. [Die Hauptwerke Vol.4] (Erlenbach - Zürich: Eugen Rentsch, 1962), p.44.

practical philosophy of success through toil, service and persistence within the strict confines of Christian belief.

Uli becomes a cheat and perjurer in a dishonest trade with a cow-dealer. In this moral crisis God appears in a hail-storm to remind him of the presence of a higher authority than himself, and of the precedence of moral over civil law. The subsequent destruction of his crops is the punishment for Uli's greed. Conversely, submission to Providence, whether it brings fortune or disaster, is rewarded with prosperity and success. Uli's visit to church after his recovery from the ensuing illness is evidence of his spiritual rebirth, since he is no longer bound by worldly thinking:

"...Ulis Gedanken hatten wieder eine höhere Richtung genommen, verarbeiteten nicht mehr bloß in ewigem und doch mühseligem Kreislauf das Einmaleins, sondern betrachteten Gottes Worte und Wege, forschten nach seinem Willen und bestimmten nach ihm das Tun."<sup>10</sup>

The intervention of a "deus ex machina" Hagelhans, who emerges from lengthy solitude to save the couple when they are faced by imminent poverty, is again an instance of divine justice and an affirmation of the right ordering of society.

The pattern of success through loyal service and a Christian ascetic work-ethic presumes the rightness of the existing social structure for, in Gotthelf's idealised patriarchal community, the individual's place in a social class, in the Marxist sense, has no relevance. In the "Uli" novels Gotthelf presents his ideal of the Christian democracy as the background to the process of self-realisation and the attainment of prosperity by personal striving and

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<sup>10</sup> Gotthelf, Uli der Pächter, p.322.

moral virtue. In this respect Uli can be regarded as an early example of the typically nineteenth-century hero who shapes his own destiny in a *laissez faire* society. The only barriers to the attainment of his goal - a farm of his own - in a divinely ordered world, arise from Uli's personal failings, his credulity and greed. The limits set to his strivings are ethical constraints, not social or economic. Possible obstructive elements, such as the limitations imposed by capitalist exploitation or by the personal ties of feudalism, are absent. This vision of self-assertion within a narrow set of traditional social values and the illusion of freedom from factors of modern determination will reappear in the agrarian idyll of the late nineteenth century in response to the class society created by capitalist expansion and industrialisation. According to Gotthelf's optimistic Christian interpretation of capital accumulation property does not have the materialist definition of capital but is a mark of ethical worth. In this allegorical world it must be earned by hard labour and Christian living and as such is a blessing from God, the social acknowledgement of humility, perseverance, and moral rectitude.

Gotthelf's conviction that the problems of the underprivileged can be solved by the Christian principles of good will, enlightened reform and patriarchal social interchange, is a refutation of the Marxist revolutionary doctrine of the elimination of class differences by radical political means.<sup>11</sup> He makes the foundation of the Christian patriarchal society a harmonious relationship between master and servant, demanding on the one hand Christian responsibility, and loyal

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11 "However much Gotthelf sympathized and helped in individual cases of poverty and hardship, he resented, and later feared, any attempts of the depressed classes to improve their economic position by political agitation." (Henry Waidson, Jeremias Gotthelf. An Introduction to the Swiss Novelist [Oxford: Blackwell, 1953], p.67) On the problem of poverty in Gotthelf's works, see: Reinhild Buhne, Jeremias Gotthelf und das Problem der Armut (Bern: Francke, 1968).



service on the other.

Gotthelf gives the Bodenbauer, embodiment of the patriarchal ideal, the functions of the teacher, priest, and father, corresponding to his educative, religious, and moral roles. The relationship between him and Uli is the expression of the author's somewhat optimistic belief that mutual trust is sufficient to bridge the gap between the social classes. The Bodenbauer rejects the widely held view that service is slavery and the master the enemy of the worker. For this class perspective he substitutes the notion that service should be a "Lehrzeit" and the master "eine Wohltat Gottes", <sup>12</sup> concerned for the welfare of his workers, a conception based on the biblical model of the wise benevolent patriarch. As the spiritual well-being of his workers is as important as his own, he admonishes Uli for his laziness and immorality and leads him from his anti-social behaviour to the right Christian life. Moreover he refuses to stand in the way of his servant's social advancement and secures him a position with his cousin. And the master puts his philanthropic ideals into practice by inviting his workers to share the comforts of the main living room rather than vegetate in their cramped and cold quarters. With the mental stimulus offered by the opportunity to use their leisure profitably in reading and writing, the servants, we are told, become aware of their worth as individuals:

"Es rührte sich etwas Besseres in ihnen, und sie begriffen immer mehr, daß es doch eigentlich ein Unterschied sei zwischen einem Mooskalb und einem vernünftigen Menschen."<sup>13</sup>

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12 Gotthelf, Uli der Knecht, p.30.

13 Ibid., p.77.

Humane concern is shown to be effective in alleviating the predicament of the underprivileged.

The social relevance of Gotthelf's works lies in the endorsement of a Christian scale of values as ultimate moral principles.<sup>14</sup> Implicit in the assumption of a generally valid moral order is the acceptance of one's station in life, a belief founded on the conservative conception of a God-given social hierarchy. The value of the unassuming existence is exemplified by the pious old woman, the heroine of Käthi die Großmutter (1847), whose very poverty and Biedermeier-like contentment are idealised because she has come to terms with life. And in Zeitgeist und Berner Geist the contented domesticity of Benz's traditional farming existence is set against the dissolution created by his neighbour Hunghans's political ambitions. Regardless of his social station the individual in Gotthelf's works is bound by a narrow conception of personal and social duty. A lazy servant brings not only himself but his farm and master into disrepute, and similarly the author condemns Joggeli for his irresponsible indifference to his property and the welfare of his workers:

"So wenig als sein Gut nahm er seine Dienerschaft ins Auge, berechnete und verteilte nie ihre Kräfte in der Bearbeitung des Gutes."<sup>15</sup>

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14 While it is possible to infer notions of "Blut und Boden" from his works, any reference to Gotthelf as a forerunner of fascist literature remains speculation. Even when, in his later works, Gotthelf invests the farmer with enduring values of tradition and morality against the evils of progress and modernity and makes attachment to the soil an ethical principle, the universal applicability of his simple Christian didacticism distinguishes him from the nationalist bias of "völkisch" authors.

15 Gotthelf, Uli der Knecht, p.168.

The process of social integration is indicated by the discovery of identity and by acceptance, the gaining of a good reputation whose social and material value the Bodenbauer stresses since it is both a sign of the individual's moral standing in the community, and essential for his happiness and success in life:

"Dieser Name öffnet oder versperert uns Herzen, macht uns wert oder unwert, gesucht oder verstoßen. Wie gering ein Mensch sein mag, so hat er doch einen Namen; auch ihn betrachten die Augen seiner Mitmenschen und urteilen, was er ihnen wert sei. So macht auch jedes Knechtlein und jedes Jungfräulein an seinem Namen unwillkürlich und nach diesem Namen kriegen sie Lohn, dieser Name bricht ihnen Bahn oder verschließt sie ihnen."<sup>16</sup>

The story of Uli's arduous road to material prosperity is the literary depiction of a gospel of salvation and success through willing labour and the individual's resources within the bounds of a transcendental, yet at the same time practical Christian ethic. Against the transience of historical development Gotthelf depicts the eternal struggle of Man for grace. Not social forces are the subject of the author's interest but character formation. The individual is Gotthelf's measure of values and the farmer is bound to the soil not by exploitation or profit motives but by Christian ethics.

Gotthelf approaches social problems from a moral viewpoint. Social stability is shown to be founded on the conservative forces of religion, moral virtue, and property. The material and social rise of the worker-hero and his recognition in the context of the idealised Christian community illustrate the social relevance of the simple practical values of toil, thrift, persistence and service. Conversely, the belief that the way to material success and social advancement is open to the individual of moral worth and strong character represents a tacit affirmation of the existing social order.

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16 Gotthelf, Uli der Knecht, p.30.

The rural milieu is portrayed not for its own sake but as a means to the author's didactic end. It is, as already mentioned, the setting for a generally human situation: the eternal moral problem of the struggle between good and evil:

"... die ihm am nächstenliegende Welt, als deren Teil er sich selbst fühlt, um seiner Sorge um den Menschen dichterisch Gestalt zu verleihen.

So gewinnt denn auch Gotthelf von vornherein die Freiheit, seine bäuerliche Welt in dem lebendigen Widerstreit von Gut und Böse, von Tüchtig und Untüchtig, von Echt und Unecht darzustellen, ihr also Leben ein - zuhauchen, wie es wirklich ist."<sup>17</sup>

#### ERLEBNISSE EINES SCHULDENBAUERS (1852)

While the "Uli" novels are concerned with character formation in an idealised Emmental farming world, untouched by social or economic change, Gotthelf turns in his final novel Erlebnisse eines Schuldenbauers to a bitter criticism of contemporary society. The farmer-hero is constructed here not as a typical, but as an exemplary contrast figure.

Through diligence and thrift Hans Joggi and Anne Marei have managed to accumulate savings on a small farm and try their fortune on a larger property. The ideal pattern of the "Uli" novels - fulfilment and success as the just reward for diligence and humility - is destroyed here by the forces of historical change. Through the purchase of the new farm the couple, whose only flaw is a naive credulity and lack of worldly wisdom, fall victim to unscrupulous speculators, run into debt, and the farm is auctioned. However, their reputation as honest and conscientious workers stands them in good stead when they seem destined to poverty, and an aged Bernese

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<sup>17</sup> Werner Kohlschmidt, "Die Welt des Bauern im Spiegel von Immermanns 'Münchhausen' und Gotthelfs 'Uli'" in: W.K., Die entzweite Welt. Studien zum Menschenbild in der neueren Dichtung (Gladbeck: Freizeiten, 1953), p.45. Underscoring indicates italics in the original.

aristocrat, the Oberherr von Stierengrind, takes them into his service where they make a secure home.

Hans Joggi is the antipode to a corrupt and godless world, the product of the erosion of spiritual values under the impact of emergent capitalism which appears in the ruthless egoism of a liberal bureaucracy. This contrast is an illustration of the author's simple didacticism. Set against a background of deceit, hostility and indifference, the hero's exemplary honesty and diligence distinguish him from the spirit of his time which, for Gotthelf, is characterised by laziness and superficiality:

"... denn ein großes Laster ist die Arbeitsscheu und ein ebenso großes Laster ist die Sucht, recht gut zu haben, ehe man etwas verdient."<sup>18</sup>

An ascetic work-ethic is here, as in the "Uli" novels, presented as the moral foundation of the Christian community:

"... da von Gott und Rechts wegen alle arbeiten sollen, das heißt alle Christen ... welche die Not uns tägliche Brot alle Tage zum Arbeiten zwingt."<sup>19</sup>

An important realistic element is introduced into the portrayal of the farmer by the demonstration of the negative consequences of his enslavement to the soil. Joggi's devotion to his farm and family makes him blind to reality, and the abstract matters of law and finance, in which he becomes involved, lie outside his horizon. Even when the farm is in liquidation he continues to invest capital and work in it although the profit accrues to others. This irrational obsession with their work makes Hans Joggi and Anne Marei believe themselves secure in their closed world:

"Das ganze Geschäft gehörte nicht in ihren Gedankenkreis, hatte einstweilen darin keine Wurzeln... Sie ermaßen weder dessen Bedeutung noch die möglichen Folgen ..."<sup>20</sup>

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18 Jeremias Gotthelf, Erlebnisse eines Schuldenbauers (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1951), p.322.

19 Ibid., pp.62-3.

20 Ibid., p.210.

The author gives here an insight into the mentality of the farmer-diligent in a restricted sphere but at the same time guileless and ignorant of the world.

This very ignorance, born of narrow-minded if commendable diligence, makes Hans Joggi the prey of a corrupt radical officialdom and judicial bureaucracy who understand how to use the complexities of legal procedure to exploit the farmer's labour and drive him from the land. The original title "Hans Joggi und der Rechtsstaat", which Gotthelf's publisher rejected on account of its political overtones, points to the central idea of the work. The author judges the impersonal and inhuman justice of the modern constitutional state by the criteria of Christian ethics. He writes in the prologue that it was sympathy with the diligent and honest folk like Hans Joggi that motivated him to write the novel. The contrast, for Gotthelf, between private values and public standards, rests here on the opposition between the state and the Christian order. Natural ethical principles are threatened by inhuman juristic organisation which has encrusted the essential spirit of justice with a pervasive formalism.

It is this bureaucracy, a manifestation of the "Zeitgeist", which protects, in the name of the liberal-democratic state, the professional freedom of the profiteer to ruin the defenceless, honest, small producer. For Gotthelf, not the secular institutionalised state, its powers weakened by a centralised bureaucratic machinery and a complex judicial system, holds the means to protect the individual from the arbitrariness of a self-seeking officialdom, but personal Christian charity:

"Hier kann nur der christliche, brüderliche Sinn,  
die Liebe helfen, die sprudelt nicht aus Staatsquellen,  
sondern aus ganz andern, der Staat wirkt gerade hier  
zumeist nur verstopfend."<sup>21</sup>

Here, again, the author proposes practical Christianity  
on a personal basis as the solution to the problem of social  
distress.

Gotthelf's political views in his later works have become  
decidedly restorative. The fact that it is a stubbornly  
conservative noble landowner who finally appears as the couple's  
rescuer with the motive:

"... die Leute sollten doch einmal ein Exempel haben,  
wer arm mache und wer aufhelfe."<sup>22</sup> -

suggests that Gotthelf, in this class whose privileges he had  
challenged in his early period of moderate liberalism, now saw the  
last stronghold of traditional religious and moral values against  
the tide of radical materialism.<sup>23</sup>

In Zeitgeist und Berner Geist also, the life of Benz, one of  
the traditional landed nobility of Bern, is portrayed as an island  
of piety, honesty, diligence and order in a godless age of progress  
and enlightenment:

"Da geht der Bauer seinen Weg ehrbar und ehrenfest  
wie die Sonne und schafft jeden Tag sein Tagewerk  
kürzer oder länger, drinnen oder draußen, immer nach  
Gottes Tagesordnung. Dabei sind seine Hände gesegnet,  
sein Hof bringt reiche Frucht, und seine Kinder blühen  
ihm munter auf, gedeihen, wie das junge Gras im  
kühlen Tau, in der Zucht und Vermahnung des Herren.  
Da wird die Arbeit und ihr Segen die wahre Lebenslust,  
der sichere Mut, der nie die Hand vom Pfluge zieht, wie  
schwer das Pflügen sein, wie lange es dauern mag, weil  
er weiß, daß der Herr bei den Seinen ist, sie nicht

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21 Gotthelf, Erlebnisse eines Schuldenbauers, p.370.

22 Ibid., p.384.

23 See: Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman, p.45.

erliegen läßt, jede treue Arbeit ein gesegnetes Ende findet. Das ist das wahre Leben voller Wonne, das nie Ekel bringt, aber eine große Befriedigung, bei welchem es dem ganzen Hausstand wohl ist ..."<sup>24</sup>

Hunghans, the farmer who becomes a district judge and commits himself to the cause of radical liberalism, loses his wife and son before he realises the error of his ways and returns to God. Here, in the polarity of the secular constitutional state and religion, Gotthelf contrasts even more clearly than in Erlebnisse eines Schuldenbauers politics with Christianity. Self-seeking materialism, immorality and corruption are attributed to emergent capitalism as to incipient socialism.<sup>25</sup>

The figure of the honest, industrious, enduring farmer embodies Gotthelf's answer to the turmoil of his age. The restorative bias which gives his later novels a distinct ideological function - the polarisation of the complex institutionalised world of emergent capitalism and the limited practical existence of the simple diligent farmer - and his moral approach to social questions anticipate the protest of the "Heimatkünstler" later in the century against the extensive transformations and upheavals in state and society which accompanied the creation of a modern industrialised Germany.

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24 Jeremias Gotthelf, Zeitgeist und Berner Geist [Die Hauptwerke Vol. 13] (Erlenbach-Zürich: Eugen Rentsch, 1966), p.338.

25 Gotthelf's conception of communism was somewhat limited by his strong personal beliefs. His attack on communism as disguised egoism is founded on emotion rather than reason: "Sie [the communist leaders] sind die Jäger, die Meute ist das Volk, das muß für die jagen; ist der Hase eingejagt, so fressen ihn die Jäger, und die Meute kriegt einige Bissen Brot, und ist sie damit nicht zufrieden, lernt sie die Hundspeitsche kennen." Ibid., p.334.

Jakob des Handwerksgeßellen Wanderungen durch die Schweiz (1847) is a more specific attack on early socialism, the ally of radical liberalism, as anti-religious and disruptive.



## INDUSTRIALISATION, THE ADVENT OF CAPITALISM AND

## THE "HEIMATKUNST" MOVEMENT

To understand why, as Peter Zimmermann points out,<sup>26</sup> the agrarian novel, having developed in the middle of the century in the direction of "Unterhaltungsliteratur", took on a marked ideological tenor which became increasingly radical at the turn of the century, it is necessary to examine briefly the historical background of this period, characterised as it was by far-reaching changes with important implications for German agriculture and the popular conception of the farmer.

The development of capitalism on the land can be traced to the liberation of the serfs (the so-called "Bauernbefreiung") of 1816<sup>27</sup>, the aim of which was to set free the economic potential of agriculture. The elimination of feudal bonds and the creation of a new class of free landowners tied to their own property was considered the prerequisite for the rationalisation of agriculture and the growth of an economy founded on liberal principles.<sup>28</sup> Land became thereby an article of trade to be bought and sold at will.

But, in reality, the reorganisation of the rural social structure did not lead as hoped to the creation of a new independent landed class but rather, especially in East Prussia with its markedly polarised agrarian society, served the interests of the Junker who,

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26 See: Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman, p.48 ff.

27 The legal process of the liberation of the serfs was, in fact, a protracted affair which, beginning with von Stein's October edict of 1807, lasted almost a decade, due mainly to the opposition of the Prussian landed aristocracy.

28 Ernst Klein, Geschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft im Industriezeitalter (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1973), p.68.

freed from his feudal obligations, took the opportunity to increase his power and influence through the purchase of land and the exploitation of the cheap liberated rural labour. The would-be landowner won his independence only at the price of compensation, in land or money, to his former lord, a process which accelerated his decline into the rural proletariat.<sup>29</sup> This "freedom" exposed the new farmer to the perils of developing capitalism - debt, mortgage, and finally, with expropriation, proletarianisation - and was, together with the removal of the Continental Barrier, the agrarian depression of the 1820's, and the inability of a not yet developed industrial sector to absorb a growing population, an important cause of widespread poverty and emigration among the lower classes:

"Während der Adel und der Gutsbesitzer mit Hilfe eines gut funktionierenden ländlichen Kredits - trotz Absatz - und Liquidationskrise und häufigem Besitzwechsel - im Endeffekt ihre wirtschaftliche und politische Stellung bewahren und sogar ausbauen konnten, verlor der freigesetzte Bauer - oft hoch verschuldet - durch die Aufhebung der Verschuldungsbeschränkungen seine Existenzgrundlage. Er war gezwungen, als freier Landarbeiter, als Deputatarbeiter und schließlich als Saisonarbeiter mit kurzfristigem Arbeitsvertrag seinen Lebensunterhalt zu suchen. Und da die regulierte, rationalisierte, doch zugleich krisengezeichnete Großlandwirtschaft weder für die freigesetzten Bauern noch für deren zahlreiche Kinder (nach 1815 vermehrte sich die Bevölkerung auf dem Lande in wenigen Jahren um mehr als 50 Prozent) einen Arbeitsplatz hatte und Armenversorgung von den Besitzenden nicht mehr geleistet werden mußte, waren sowohl die bäuerlichen und halbbäuerlich - handwerklichen als auch die unterbäuerlichen Schichten zur Abwanderung gezwungen. Eigentumslos, entwurzelt, heimatlos zwischen 'Staat und Stand', lebte nahezu die Hälfte der Einwohner in den deutschen Territorien in Armut und Elend."<sup>30</sup>

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29 Klein, Geschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft im Industriezeitalter, p.90.

30 Helmut Böhme, Prolegomena zu einer Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte Deutschlands im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1976), p.31.

Thus the "Bauernbefreiung", together with other contributing factors, played an important role in the transformation in agriculture from a feudal to a capitalist basis and helped to reinforce class differences on the land.

The period from 1830 to 1870 was a time of stability and prosperity in agriculture, with high prices for products and relatively sinking costs.<sup>31</sup> But although, through intensive farming, the average increase in agricultural production between 1870 and the First World War outstripped the increment in population,<sup>32</sup> it was unable to keep up with demand.<sup>33</sup> Germany, formerly an exporting nation in agricultural produce, was compelled to import. Moreover, from the middle of the 1860's German agriculture found itself unable to compete with foreign grain grown with low costs and transported cheaply from America and Russia. As a consequence she lost the West European market and the prices for local produce dropped. In the period of initial economic growth from 1850 to 1870 free trade had been recognised as the necessary condition for increased production, but the general depression of the 1870's, the inability of German agriculture to compete on the international market, and rising costs led to the introduction of a Tariff Bill in 1879 which brought about a temporary stabilisation of agricultural prices.

Whereas up to the end of the 1870's the interests of industry and agriculture had progressed together, shifts in population distribution and the economic policy of Chancellor Bismarck's successor Caprivi caused the agricultural crisis to develop into a struggle between the two sectors.

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31 Klein, Geschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft im Industriezeitalter, p.91.

32 Germany's population (without taking account of emigration) increased 66% from 1870 (40.8million) to 1914 (67.8m.) at an average annual rate of 1.5% in comparison with less than 1% average annual growth in the periods from 1800 to 1840 & 1840-1870. (Ibid., p.120)

33 Ibid., p.127 ff.

Until 1870 industrial growth had had no significant effect on the proportion of urban to rural population, and at the end of the 1870's Germany was still an agrarian nation.<sup>34</sup> But the demand for labour in the cities, especially in factories, higher wages for industrial than for rural workers and transformations in labour relations on the land were responsible for a migration from the agrarian East to the industrial areas of the West.<sup>35</sup> The flight from the land was accompanied by the concentration of population in large cities.

The agricultural crisis was worsened by a change in Germany's political leadership. Bismarck, who had been sympathetic to the interests of the agrarian sector, was replaced as Chancellor in 1890 by Caprivi who proceeded to make a series of new trading contracts favouring grain imports, a policy which obviously ran contrary to the interests of agriculture. This coincided with the beginning of a new industrial boom in the early 1890's and a renewed drop in agricultural prices.

As predominantly grain-producers the Prussian landed aristocracy, through indebtedness and increasing labour costs, were especially affected by the crisis and in 1893 the "Bund der Landwirte", an alliance of Junkers, was formed ostensibly to represent the interests of all landed classes.<sup>36</sup> This association had close political

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34 Karl Born, "Der soziale und wirtschaftliche Strukturwandel Deutschlands am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts," in: Hans-Ulrich Wehler (ed.), Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte (Köln: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1966), p.271.

35 1882: numbers employed in agriculture totalled 19.2 million, in industry 16m. 1895: numbers employed in agriculture totalled 18.5m., in industry 20.2m. (Heinz Haushofer, Die deutsche Landwirtschaft im technischen Zeitalter [Stuttgart: Eugen Ulmer, 1963], p.180) In the nineties the numbers employed in agriculture increased 0.68%, in industry 29.4%, and in trade and transport 48.92%. (Böhme, Prolegomena ..., p.85) .

36 These comments are taken from Hans-Jürgen Puhle's detailed study of the "Bund der Landwirte", Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preußischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich 1893-1914 (Hannover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschehen, 1967).

connections with conservative parties, above all with the Deutsch-Konservative Partei, and was thus able to influence the election of parliamentary candidates. Their agitation was a form of opposition to the direction of contemporary economic and social developments:

"Die Landwirtschaft war seit dem Anfang der neunziger Jahre die schwache Stelle in der deutschen Wirtschaft und stand seitdem in einem scharfen wirtschaftspolitischen Gegensatz zur Industrie und zum Handel. Nachdem sie bis dahin an den jeweils neuen Entwicklungstendenzen - Freihandel, Kapitalismus, Protektionismus - teilgenommen hatte, versuchte sie sich nunmehr mit allen Kräften gegen die allgemeine wirtschaftliche und soziale Entwicklung zu behaupten."<sup>37</sup>

This agrarian pressure group had a conservative programme and claimed to represent broad middle-class interests. However, it was, in fact, rather the political and ideological instrument of the Prussian Junkers who had maintained their authority in the army, the bureaucracy, and in politics.<sup>38</sup> The last quarter of the century witnessed the acceleration of the transformation of the landed aristocracy from a traditional caste of birth and blood to a class of capitalist entrepreneurs, and the consolidation of their class superiority:

"Die Umwandlung der Rittergutsbesitzer von einem Erbstand adliger Feudalherren in eine für den Markt produzierende und schließlich in ihrer Mehrheit aus Bürgerlichen bestehende Erwerbsklasse von agrarischen Unternehmern sowie der Verlust eines Teils ihrer ursprünglichen Privilegien (wie der Patrimonialgerichtsbarkeit) im Laufe des 19. Jahrhunderts haben den Charakter der Güter als lokaler Machtzentren nicht wesentlich verändert."<sup>39</sup>

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37 Born, "Der soziale und wirtschaftliche Strukturwandel Deutschlands am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts", p.277. Underscorings indicate italics in the original.

38 For the history of the landed aristocracy see: Hans Rosenberg, "Die Pseudodemokratisierung der Rittergutsbesitzerklasse", in: Wehler, Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte, pp.287-308.

39 Gerhard Ritter and Jürgen Kocka (eds.), Deutsche Sozialgeschichte. Dokumente und Skizzen Vol.2, 1870-1914 (München: Beck, 1974), p.178.

Rational production methods which the Junker, by virtue of his capital resources, was better able to utilize than the small farmer, and technical advances-intensivisation and mechanisation of agriculture - to which he was often more receptive, led to the growth of capitalist enterprises on the land, especially in the area of the large sugar beet estates in Saxony and east of the Elbe. Here, under the impact of industrial change-commercialisation and the development of market-orientated production - and as a result of the reinforced hegemony of the landed aristocracy, the transformation of the social structure was especially marked. Financial contracts replaced the patriarchal relationship between employer and worker, and although no large-scale monopolisation of landownership took place in agriculture as it did with production in industry, the spread of capitalist practices on the land (production for profit, competition, the use of machinery) brought economic pressure to bear above all on the small or middle farmer who continued to adhere to obsolescent methods, and sharpened his hostility to the powerful aristocratic landowner.

It was against this dramatically changing social and economic background that the question of whether Germany was to grow into an international "Industriestaat" or remain an "Agrarstaat" became the topic of discussion not only in political circles but also in contemporary literature and the press.<sup>40</sup> Peter Zimmermann makes this point when he refers to the "... enge Verflechtung von agrarischer Verbands - und Parteipolitik, Heimatkunsttheorie und Bauernliteratur ..."<sup>41</sup>

40 See: Erich Ruprecht and Dieter Bänisch (eds.), Literarische Manifeste der Jahrhundertwende 1890-1910 (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1970), especially pp.321-363.

41 Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman, p.56.

The literary movement which emerged in the 1890's from this controversy called itself "Heimatkunst".<sup>42</sup> Adolf Bartels, an ardent anti-Semitist, and a romantic idealist Friedrich Lienhard, who were chiefly responsible for formulating this concept, attacked the contemporary social and economic developments on cultural grounds. The belief, popular especially in conservative circles, that the modern industrial state failed to represent the genuine German spirit, gave rise to a new evaluation of farming life:

"Nein, wir wollen keine Händler und Schacherer,  
keine Weltgauner werden, wir wollen ein  
Bauernvolk bleiben ... und damit ein Kulturvolk;  
denn der Kulturbegriff kommt von bauen, anbauen,  
den Boden bebauen."<sup>43</sup>

The view of the farmer was coloured by the growing nationalist sentiment. Romantic conservatives such as Julius Langbehn saw the "Bauer" as the incarnation of the German character and the predicament of agriculture in an age of industrial - capitalist development became a question of national importance:

"Bauernseele ist Volksseele. Der Mensch, in seiner  
urthümlichsten Lebensform, ist Bauer ..."<sup>44</sup>

Such a movement with its strong agrarian bias - the widespread belief in the virtues of rural life and the disadvantages of a high level of industrialisation - was, at a time when industry, trade, and commerce had already assumed the dominant roles in national life, per se a reaction against contemporary culture. As such it was one aspect of the "Kulturpessimismus" which became a feature of conservative thought in the late nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup>

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42 As Robert Minder points out, however, "Heimatkunst" was not a movement peculiar to Germany but a European phenomenon. See the chapter "Johann Peter Hebel und die französische Heimatliteratur," in: R.M. Dichter in der Gesellschaft. Erfahrungen mit deutscher und französischer Literatur (Frankfurt/M.: Insel, 1966), pp.108-139.

43 Adolf Bartels, Rasse und Volkstum; gesammelte Aufsätze zur nationalen Weltanschauung (Weimar: Alexander Duncker, 1920), p.233.

44 Julius Langbehn, Rembrandt als Erzieher. Von einem Deutschen (Leipzig: Hirschfeld, 1890), p.199.

45 See: Fritz Stern, Kulturpessimismus als politische Gefahr. Eine Analyse nationaler Ideologie in Deutschland (Bern: Scherz, 1963).

Friedrich Lienhard deplored above all Berlin's dominance in the nation's political, social, and cultural life. The capital was, for the "Heimatkünstler," the seat of decadence and un-German culture, of philosophies alien to the true German spirit : science, rationalism, and political radicalism. The dominant literary movement of the time, naturalism, was condemned, by reference to its French origins, as decadent and international, especially as its exponents frequently turned to the realistic depiction of those social problems which the "Heimatkünstler" sought to avoid. The 1890's, too, saw the rapid growth of modern anti-Semitism, for, on the basis of similar nationalist sentiment the Jew, through his involvement in contemporary life, especially in the arts and commerce, the embodiment of the modern age, was made the scapegoat for the liberalism and materialism which, it was claimed, threatened the German nation. The anti-urban tenor of the "Heimatkunst" movement and the longing for a national cohesion as the expression of common traditions and background, which even Bismarck's successful wars had failed to create, were accompanied by a call for the decentralisation of political, social, and cultural life to the provinces and for the artistic expression of the uniqueness of the different ethnic groups as regional microcosms of national individuality:

"Die irrende Seele der Deutschen ... muß sich wieder an den heimatlichen Boden binden; der holsteinische Maler soll holsteinisch, der thüringische thüringisch, der bairische bairisch malen ..."<sup>46</sup>

The origins of this agrarian ideology, then, lay in a dissatisfaction with the forms of the present. Modernity - the liberal, rational, materialist society of the turn of the century -

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46 Langbehn, Rembrandt als Erzieher, p.19.



became, broadly speaking, the target for the attacks of a disorientated middle class, bound to traditional conventions and attitudes, which the advance of industrial capitalism had driven into a crisis.<sup>47</sup> The traditional social structure, founded on the tripartite estate hierarchy of the aristocracy, middle class and peasantry, finally dissolved as in the 1880's and 1890's the expansion of the capitalist system - the formation of industrial monopolies and cartels and the concentration of population in the cities - sharpened social tensions and, in spite of alternately repressive and palliative measures from the state,<sup>48</sup> led to the creation of a class-conscious urban proletariat. The appeal of the agrarian ideology of the "Heimatkunst" movement, with its avoidance of social questions and aspirations of a harmonious community united by national sentiment, can be explained by the existence of a widely-based social group, petit-bourgeois in its expectations and assumptions, which was economically threatened by a progressive capitalist class and yet, in its conservative outlook, ideologically

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47 "Die Heimatkunst nimmt sich verunsicherter Leserschichten an." (Karlheinz Roszbacher, Heimatkunstabewegung und Heimatroman. Zu einer Literatursoziologie der Jahrhundertwende [Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1975], p.93 ). Roszbacher defines this public more specifically as a rising lower middle class. (Ibid., p.98) Zimmermann reaches a similar conclusion. (Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman, p.66 )

48 In 1890, nevertheless, the Social Democrats won more votes than any other party, and were by 1903 the second largest party in the Reichstag.

alienated from the proletariat.<sup>49</sup>

In conclusion it can be said that the course of social and economic developments in the last quarter of the nineteenth century gave birth to an idealism which rejected historical development and advocated the return to beliefs appropriate not to a changing present but to a static pre-industrial, pre-capitalist past. It was only logical that in this period the agrarian novel which, with its interest in the province and village, became the obvious vehicle for this mixture of nostalgia and social criticism, enjoyed a remarkable surge in popularity.<sup>50</sup>

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49 The definition of the term "petit-bourgeois" in this work is constructed along the lines of the Marxist conception which, although sometimes employed for polemic rather than for objective analysis, does serve to explain the origins of this group's peculiar mentality from its position in capitalist society:

"The term 'petite bourgeoisie' is used in Marxist-Leninist theory to define the social stratum or class of bourgeois society which occupies an intermediate position between the two basic capitalist classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It comprises farmers, craftsmen and tradespeople of all kinds who, like the capitalist, own means of production but, in contrast to them, do not generally exploit the labour of others, i.e. they live by their own work, are exploited by the bourgeoisie and in this respect can also be counted to the proletariat." (Claus Kernig [ed.], Marxism, Communism and Western Society, a comparative encyclopaedia [New York: Herder and Herder, 1973], Vol.6, p.292).

The characteristics of the petite bourgeoisie can be summed up as follows. Their social position is that of the old middle classes: made up of small-scale producers they are engaged in an economic struggle with large-scale capitalism and an ideological struggle with the proletariat. For Marx it is a declining class doomed ultimately to extinction. Politically it is an unorganised and uncommitted group, psychologically marked by an individualism which reveals itself in the rejection of class theory, and in its defence of petty property and minor positions of status.

50 See: Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman, p.158 ff.

## THE MARXIST VIEW OF THE FARMER

Conservative ideology attached to the farmer moral qualities and, on the assumption that he represented a superior, distinct human type, heroised him as the embodiment of a national spirit threatened by the spread of uncontrolled capitalism and the acceleration of industrial development. Social concern was expressed in the literature of the "Heimatkünstler" not in the confrontation of antagonistic socio-economic forces but in the agrarian idyll as the projection of middle-class nostalgia for a harmonious social and cultural ideal.

In contrast, the Marxist view put the farmer in his position within a social class and treated the agrarian problem not as a moral, national or cultural concern, but as a question of social organisation. The Marxist attitude towards the farmer evolved from observations of his role within capitalist society. A typical social definition is that by the economist Jürgen Kuczynski who, in an analysis of the social structure of the Wilhelmine state, categorised the farmer as a politically uncommitted, unstable element with the distinguishing characteristics of the petite bourgeoisie : economically on a level with the proletariat yet sharing the traditional conservative outlook of the middle class:

"Die Kleinbourgeoisie ist im Grunde nur dadurch gezeichnet, daß sie keiner der beiden großen Klassen Bourgeoisie und Arbeiter angehört. Sie ist zu einem erheblichen Teil proletarisiert, ohne deswegen Proletariat zu sein. Sie ist zu einem erheblichen Teil verbürgerlicht, ohne deswegen Bourgeoisie zu sein. Sie setzt sich aus so grundlegend verschiedenen Schichten zusammen wie der Übergroßen Mehrheit der Angestellten, der Übergroßen Mehrheit der Beamten, der Übergroßen Mehrheit der Bauern, der Übergroßen

Mehrheit der Handwerker, den kleinen Ladenbesitzern und dazu einem recht beachtlichen Teil der Intelligenz, die zum Teil bereits in den Angestellten und Beamten enthalten ist."<sup>51</sup>

Such an observation of the political and social isolation of the rural population had led Marx, similarly, to stress the contradiction between their economic situation and narrow reactionary mentality with reference to the French peasantry under the Bonapartist dynasty:

"Insofern Millionen von Familien unter ökonomischen Existenzbedingungen leben, die ihre Lebensweise, ihre Interessen und ihre Bildung von denen der andern Klassen trennen und ihnen feindlich gegenüberstellen, bilden sie eine Klasse. Insofern ein nur lokaler Zusammenhang unter den Parzellenbauern besteht, die Dieselbigkeit ihrer Interessen keine Gemeinsamkeit, keine nationale Verbindung und keine politische Organisation unter ihnen erzeugt, bilden sie keine Klasse."<sup>52</sup>

The conviction that the small farmer as a producer was economically and psychologically unsuited to be a factor of progress in the class struggle and lacked interest in the changing course of history led Marx and Engels not merely to assume, but openly to welcome the proletarianisation of the small farmer through the ineluctable workings of economic evolution. The political struggle against the bourgeoisie was to be fought in the interests not of the middle classes but of the revolutionary proletariat. While conservative theorists argued for the survival and regeneration of the peasant, Marx looked to his decline, asserting that, in his efforts to defend his meagre property against the tide of capitalism, he represented a stubborn bastion of bourgeois reaction:

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51 Jürgen Kuczynski, Klassen und Klassenkämpfe im imperialistischen Deutschland und in der BRD (Frankfurt/M.: Marxistische Blätter, 1972), p.139.

52 Karl Marx, "Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte," in: Marx, Engels, Werke Vol.8 (Berlin [DDR]: Dietz, 1973), p.198.

"Die Mittelstände, der kleine Industrielle, der kleine Kaufmann, der Handwerker, der Bauer, sie alle bekämpfen die Bourgeoisie, um ihre Existenz als Mittelstände vor dem Untergang zu sichern. Sie sind also nicht revolutionär, sondern konservativ. Noch mehr, sie sind reaktionär, sie suchen das Rad der Geschichte zurückzudrehen. Sind sie revolutionär, so sind sie es im Hinblick auf den ihnen bevorstehenden Übergang ins Proletariat, so verteidigen sie nicht ihre gegenwärtigen, sondern ihre zukünftigen Interessen, so verlassen sie ihren eigenen Standpunkt, um sich auf den des Proletariats zu stellen."<sup>53</sup>

It was assumed that the transformation of the class structure through industrial-capitalist development would unite the small farmer with the rural labourer, in whom the socialist movement put its highest hopes on the land, in a working-class alliance with the urban proletariat against capitalist oppression.

This theory of social movement was founded on the premises of Marxist economic theory.

On the assumption that, under capitalism, it was subject to the same historical and economic laws as industry, Marx predicted that agriculture would undergo a similar process of concentration into a few large production units.<sup>54</sup> With the development of an extensive marketing system, rationalisation, and technological progress, the profit-seeking capitalist entrepreneur, for whom the land represents capital, replaces as the dominant type of landowner the self-sufficient producer who works only to satisfy the needs of his family. The small farmer, it was believed, unable to meet the competition of large-scale agriculture, ultimately descends to the economic level of the landless labourer. In the final stage, the expropriated farmer, as

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53 Karl Marx, "Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei," in: Marx, Engels, Werke Vol. 4 (Berlin [DDR]: Dietz, 1972), p.472.

54 In fact this assumed concentration of land failed to materialise, which necessitated a revision of Marxist tenets. See: Ritter and Kocka (eds.), Deutsche Sozialgeschichte, p.177. Also: David Mitran, Marx against the Peasant: a study in social dogmatism (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1951), p.25.

one of the working class, is alienated from the means of production (property ownership), and the profits of his labour accrue to the capitalist.

Both Marx and Engels, as mentioned, accepted the destruction of the peasantry as a class, a conclusion based on their conviction that the small holding was doomed to extinction. In accordance with their progressive theory of historical development which posited industrialisation and capitalist concentration of production as the natural and necessary prelude to the construction of a socialist society, they predicted the ruin of the peasant from the obsolescence of his production:

"Diese Produktionsweise [the small holding] unterstellt Zersplitterung des Bodens und der übrigen Produktionsmittel. Wie die Konzentration der letzteren, so schließt sie auch die Kooperation, Teilung der Arbeit innerhalb derselben Produktionsprozesse, gesellschaftliche Beherrschung und Regelung der Natur, freie Entwicklung der gesellschaftlichen Produktivkräfte aus. Sie ist nur verträglich mit engen naturwüchsigen Schranken der Produktion und der Gesellschaft.... Sie muß vernichtet werden, sie wird vernichtet. Ihre Vernichtung, die Verwandlung der individuellen und zersplitterten Produktionsmittel in gesellschaftlich konzentrierte, daher des zwerghaften Eigentums vieler in das massenhafte Eigentum weniger, daher die Expropriation der großen Volksmasse von Grund und Boden und Lebensmitteln und Arbeitsinstrumenten, diese furchtbare und schwierige Expropriation der Volksmasse bildet die Vorgeschichte des Kapitals."<sup>55</sup>

Similarly Friedrich Engels:

"Es ist die Pflicht unsrer Partei, den Bauern immer und immer wieder die absolute Rettungslosigkeit ihrer Lage, solange der Kapitalismus herrscht, klarzumachen, die absolute Unmöglichkeit, ihnen ihr Parzelleneigentum als solches zu erhalten, die absolute Gewißheit, daß die kapitalistische Großproduktion über ihren machtlosen veralteten Kleinbetrieb hinweggehn wird wie ein Eisenbahnzug über eine Schubkarre."<sup>56</sup>

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55 Karl Marx, "Das Kapital", in: Marx, Engels, Werke Vol.23 (Berlin [DDR]: Dietz, 1972), pp.789-790.

56 Friedrich Engels, "Die Bauernfrage in Frankreich und Deutschland," in: F.E., Zur Bauernfrage (Berlin [DDR]: Dietz, 1971), p.67.

Moreover, the stubborn individualism of the farmer, born of his engrained sense of property, which, as we shall see, was idealised by the "Heimatkünstler," was anathema to a social theory constructed on the ideal of revolutionary collectivism. The Marxist creed of proletarian supremacy and the hostility to the small producer as a potential force of bourgeois reaction posed a threat to middle-class assumptions and values. In this context, the absence of literary depictions of rural life from a historically progressive, i.e. proletarian viewpoint in this period may be explained by several factors. The growth of a -largely middle-class - commercial market for literature in the cities can be linked to urbanisation and industrialisation, while the psychological and economic subjection of the rural proletariat, the product of political and judicial oppression which was responsible for a lack of direction in political protest on the land, geographical isolation, the urban bias of the industry-orientated workers' movement, and a socialist agrarian programme hostile to the small and middle farmer, meant the exclusion of the rural dweller from participation in, or reception of, progressive literature.

## WILHELM VON POLENZ

While the works to be examined - Der Blüttnerbauer (1895) and Der Grabenhäger (1897) - contain typical motifs of the "Heimatkunst" movement, the direct confrontation of Polenz (1861-1903) in his writings with the problems of his time is, paradoxically, evidence of his debt to its avowed opponent: naturalism. Hilde Krause, in her literary study of Polenz, describes him as a "Kulturhistoriker"<sup>57</sup> and appropriately describes his novels as "Ausdruck der Auseinandersetzung eines Menschen mit den geistigen Strömungen und Problemen seiner Zeit."<sup>58</sup> The role of religion, the plight of the proletariat, the emancipation of women and the agrarian question: these are controversial current issues which are dealt with in his works. His objectivity, an insight into the interaction of social and economic forces and a perception of historical developments, is illustrated in his agrarian novels and sets him apart from less sophisticated writers such as Peter Rosegger. This talent for observation, with the addition of knowledge in law and history, seems to have been accompanied by sincere ethical convictions and social concern which, bound within the limits of a cautious conservatism, made him reject a radical political solution to social problems and led him instead to envisage - perhaps naively - the possibility of alleviating distress and impoverishment through social reform and Christian responsibility.

The origins of this conservatism lay undoubtedly, to a large extent, in Polenz's own rural background. From 1891 he himself

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57 Hilde Krause, Wilhelm von Polenz als Erzähler (Diss. [Masch.] München, 1937), p.71.

58 Ibid., p.32.



farmed on his family's estate in Oberlausitz, and so was familiar from experience with the thinking of the landowners:

"Unter den sogenannten 'brennenden Fragen', die mich interessieren, steht mit an erster Stelle die Agrarfrage, die mir als Grundbesitzer sozusagen auf den Nähten brennt. Mein Beruf ist der des Grundbesitzers, den ich mit keinem anderen vertauschen möchte. Wie ich zur Scholle stehe und dem darauf lebenden Volke, habe ich im 'Büttnerbauer' gestaltet."<sup>59</sup>

Laws of inheritance and the refusal of his kin to curb their self-seeking for the sake of the family property have encumbered the land of Traugott Büttner, proud owner of the oldest - established farm in the Lausitz village of Hagenau, with debt, and he is forced to turn to unscrupulous financiers in the city for credit. Misfortune and the depressed agricultural situation of the late Wilhelmine era have added an extra burden. On the one hand he is exploited by ruthless profiteers and agents, on the other pressed by a powerful Junker, Count Saland, to sell his land. The farm is finally auctioned, bought and partitioned by a Jewish speculator, Sam Harrassowitz. The author now follows the mental and physical decline of the old man, degraded to the level of a servant, and his withdrawal from a hostile world. The ruin of the farm has dissolved his family and the Büttnerbauer, alone on the land which has given his existence purpose but which is no longer his own, puts an end to his life.

Traugott Büttner's property is an extension of his personality. The farmer and the land which is the product of his own devotion and toil are parts of one organism:

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59 "Im Spiegel." Literarisches Echo, 1900. Quoted in: Krause, Wilhelm von Polenz als Erzähler, p.36.

"Das war doch sein Eigentum! Hundertfach hatte er es dazu gemacht durch die Arbeit! Da war nicht ein Fußbreit Land, den er nicht gepflegt hätte mit seinen Händen. Sein Acker war ihm vertraut wie ein Freund. Er kannte alle seine Eigenarten, seine Schwächen wie Vorzüge, bis ins kleinste hinein. Er stand zu diesem Boden, dessen Sohn er war, doch auch wieder wie die Mutter zum Kinde; er hatte ihm von dem seinen gegeben: seine Sorge, seine Liebe, seinen Schweiß."<sup>60</sup>

This obsessive attachment to the soil - Polenz makes this the distinctive feature of the independent middle farmer - is shown to be linked with Büttner's dogged adherence to tradition which blinds him to the trends of his age and plays an important part in his downfall.

This veneration for the past takes the form of a fidelity to time-honoured but antiquated thinking, to the ways of his forebears:

"Die Vergangenheit bildete aber nicht bloß den vielbetrachteten Hintergrund seines Daseins, sie wirkte geradezu entscheidend auf seine Entschlüsse ein. Er war gebunden in seinem Willen an Taten und Absichten seiner Vorfahren. Ohne sich dessen selbst recht bewußt zu werden, ließ er sich leiten von frommer Rücksicht auf Wunsch und Willen jener Entschlafenen, die für ihn eben Gegenwärtige waren."<sup>61</sup>

His father, too, was to an extent conservative, but in Traugott this respect for the past becomes a stubborn resistance to change and retreat from the outside world:

"Er verstand seine Zeit nicht, wollte sie nicht verstehen. Er haßte jede Neuerung von Grund der Seele, und brachte es darum niemals zu einer Verbesserung. Er glaubte, die neue Zeit mit Verachtung zu strafen und merkte nicht, daß sie achtlos über ihn hinwegschritt und ihm den Rücken wandte. Mürrisch hatte er sich auf sich selbst zurückgezogen, zehrte von seinem Trotze und lebte ein glückliches Leben in der Erinnerung an die 'gute alte Zeit', die doch ihrerzeit auch mal neu gewesen war."<sup>62</sup>

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60 Wilhelm von Polenz, Der Büttnerbauer (Berlin: Fontane, 1910), p.81.

61 Ibid., p.175.

62 Ibid., p.183.

The Büttnerbauer's personality acquires general relevance as the mentality typical of his class:

"Traugott Büttner hatte sicher viele Versehen begangen, mancherlei verdorben durch Eigensinn und beschränkten Trotz. Viel Schaden hätte abgewendet werden können, wenn ihm Beweglichkeit des Geistes, höhere Bildung und besseres Verstehen der Zeit und ihrer Bedürfnisse eigen gewesen wäre. Aber größere Fehler, als die seinem Stande eigentümlichen, durften ihm mit Recht nicht vorgeworfen werden."<sup>63</sup>

In the new age of developing capitalism the farmer's adherence to tradition expresses itself in opposition to technological progress. When agricultural developments demand adaptation to changing methods of production, the farmer sacrifices efficiency to habit, holding fast to the outmoded ways and outlook of his forefathers. Büttner's reluctance to employ labour outside the family means that he must neglect one of his fields, which prolongs the harvest. His son Gustav's suggestions of improvements provoke the deeply-rooted prejudices of the farmer:

"Solche Neuerungen waren höchstens dazu erfunden, den Landmann zu verderben."<sup>64</sup>

Faced by increased costs he lacks the capital to profit from economic booms, is burdened with debt in recessions, and thus is unable to intensify production. Although he owns too much land to farm profitably, he refuses to sell any part of it, in order to keep the family farm intact. The fatal necessity of the farmer's ties to the land makes him incapable of comprehending a different form of production. And it is this very blindness to his own best interests which the cunning merchant Sam Harrassowitz knows so well how to exploit:

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<sup>63</sup> Polenz, Der Büttnerbauer, p.311.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.27.

"Er war, in seiner Art, ein Kenner des deutschen Bauern. Er wußte, wie zähe diese Sorte an der Scholle klebt, wie ihr zur Erde gewandter Blick sie dumpf und blöde macht, unfähig, Vorteil von Nachteil zu unterscheiden."<sup>65</sup>

Polenz saw the implications of adherence to habit and tradition in an age of radical change. The advent of technological progress, he illustrates, is accompanied by the decline of the traditional land-owning middle class whose psychological ties to the past stand in the way of productive and competitive farming, and thus constitute a significant factor in its decline.

The historical background to the Büttnerbauer's decline is formed by socio-economic processes, notably the Stein-Hardenberg reforms of 1807-1816. In the wake of the "Bauernbefreiung" Büttner's grandfather lost a third of his land to the Junker estate and we are told that Traugott, the present owner, has, like his father, resisted the attempts of his neighbour Count Saland, whose estate encloses his on three sides, to expand his domain through the purchase of his wood. Although he must accept the rationality of the overseer's argument that his only hope of rescue from the dangers of debt and mortgage lies in selling an unprofitable part of his land, the prejudices of his class towards the Junker cloud Büttner's judgement:

"Gänzlich konnte er sich der Einsicht ja nicht verschließen, daß ihm hier ein günstiges Angebot gemacht wurde; aber das alt eingewurzelte, bei den meisten Bauern tief eingefleischte Mißtrauen gegen alles, was von seiten der Herrschaft kommt, verhinderte ihn, nüchtern und vorurteilsfrei zu erwägen."<sup>66</sup>

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65 Polenz, Der Büttnerbauer, p.378.

66 Ibid., p.73.

In the deliberations of the farmer, Polenz here reveals the origins of class rivalry on the land, for Büttner's mistrust of the aristocracy is shown to be a product of the growth of the feudal Junker caste into a class of leisured, self-seeking landowners.

While recognising the efficiency of capitalist production, the author is at the same time critical of the socio-ethical consequences of the new system. The moralist Polenz makes the egoism and greed for profit, in his view characteristic of capitalist thinking, responsible for the disruption of that traditional bond of labour uniting the tiller and the soil which should exist between the Junker and his land.<sup>67</sup> This degeneration is exemplified in the Büttner's neighbour Count Saland. An absentee landlord who lives in Berlin and leaves the management of his farm to overseers, he has erected a modern factory on his land, and is determined to purchase Büttner's property in order to enlarge his hunting domain.

The modern capitalist conception of farming is presented not only from the perspective of the economically oppressed independent family producer but also through the eyes of the migrant labourer. The nature of modern social relationships here becomes clearer.

The Büttnerbauer's younger son, like his father, is a victim of the modern age. He becomes acquainted for the first time with the principles of capitalist agriculture on a sugar beet estate in Saxony where, seeking better opportunities, he has the task of supervising a work-party from the village. Here, he discovers, the landowner is nothing more than an entrepreneur intent to extract the maximum profit from labour and land:

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67 This becomes a major theme in Polenz's other agrarian novel Der Grabenhäger.

"Der Grundbesitzer schien hier kaum noch eine Person; hinter ihm standen andere Mächte: die Fabrik, die Aktie, das Kapital, die zwischen den Besitzer und sein Stück Erde traten."<sup>68</sup>

Gustav observes how the power of money has destroyed the traditional patriarchal relationship between the landowner and his workers.

This leads Polenz, with a disregard for its own inherent evils of exploitation and repression, to a sentimental idealisation of feudalism whose personal bondage, based on reciprocal ties of obligations and rights, he contrasts with the abstract dependence on capital:

"Bei dieser modernen Form der Hörigkeit aber fehlte der ausgleichende und versöhnende Kitt der Tradition. Hier herrschte die parvenuhafte Macht von gestern protzig und frivol, die herzlose Unterjochung unter die kalte Hand des Kapitals."<sup>69</sup>

The spirit of capitalism has pervaded also the system of law.

"Deutsches Recht", which the jurist Polenz interprets as the inalienable right of the farmer to the land he has tilled, has been displaced by Romanism<sup>70</sup>, the rational concept of thinking in terms of money. Legalistic notions are mixed with moral judgements. In an age characterised by a speculative, materialist mentality, an institutionalised, formalised system of jurisdiction has made the honest but ignorant farmer the victim of the profiteer and the soil an object of trade. Against the corrupt world of business and finance represented by the urban speculator Sam Harrassowitz, in which the individual is no longer forced to earn a living by his own resources, Polenz sets the moral value of toil exhibited in the farmer's bonds with the land:

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68 Polenz, Der Blüttnerbauer, p.408.

69 Ibid., p.379.

70 Ibid., p.314 ff.

"Fortan konnte einem ein Stück Land gehören, der nie seinen Fuß darauf gesetzt, geschweige denn, eine Hand gerührt, um es durch Arbeit zu seinem Eigen zu machen.... Den Ausschlag gab nicht mehr die lebendige Kraft des Armes, sondern erklügelte, in Büchern niedergeschriebene, tote Satzung.... Das Verpfänden und Belasten des Grund und Bodens ward in ein System gebracht, das den Urgrund aller menschlichen Verhältnisse, die Scholle, einem Handelsartikel gleichstellte."<sup>71</sup>

As in Gotthelf's Erlebnisse eines Schuldenbauers the simple, practical farmer-hero is confronted by a complex world of institutions and principles which he cannot understand, and is ruined.

While Polenz's perception of the degenerative influence of environment, habit, and tradition led him to present his hero's death as a historical necessity, he at the same time invests the Büttnerbauer's struggle with representative significance. The farmer stands for an exemplary ethical code which the author compares with the self-seeking materialism, class egoism, competition and inhuman organisation of developing capitalism. Polenz attributes his hero with conventional, respectable, if narrow and unrefined bourgeois<sup>72</sup> values: order, diligence, decency, and loyalty towards the family, community, Church and state:

"Er war Zeit seines Lebens ein nüchterner, ordentlicher Mensch gewesen, ein tätiger Wirt und sorgsamer Haushalter. Sein Benehmen war bäuerlich derb, oft bis zur Rauheit derb, aber seine Sitten waren rein geblieben. Was hatte er sich vorzuwerfen!

71 Polenz, Der Büttnerbauer, p.316.

72 The terms "bourgeois" and "middle-class" are, in meaning, difficult to distinguish. "Bourgeois", which I use in a general way to describe values in keeping with convention, can in this sense be roughly translated by "bürgerlich", denoting conformity and acceptance, later with connotations of "civil" and "everyday" as opposed to "military" and "heroic". In the chapters dealing with socialist literature "bourgeois" is used to compare ideologies. The term "bourgeoisie" is reserved for the capitalist classes. The term "middle-class" is used to describe attributes peculiar to the "middle" class, in reference to its position within capitalist society between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

War er etwa ein Trinker gewesen? - Hatte er Haus und Hof verspielt, wie so mancher Bauer es tat? Hatte er durch liederliche Wirtschaft oder durch Zank und Streit mit den Nachbarn, durch Prozesse das Seine vergeudet? - Dem Staate, der Gemeinde, der Kirche hatte er geleistet, was er ihnen schuldig war. Seine Knochen hatte er in zwei Kriegen für das Vaterland zu Markte getragen. Sonntäglich war er zur Predigt gegangen, und viermal im Jahre hatte er den Tisch des Herrn aufgesucht. Die schlechten Jahre waren von ihm hingenommen worden, und für die guten hatte er Gott gedankt. Mit seiner Ehefrau hatte er sich vertragen; nie war es zu mehr als zu Scheltworten gekommen zwischen ihnen, was bei Bauersleuten etwas heißen will. Die Kinder hatten sie schlicht und recht aufgezogen nach dem Worte: 'Wer sein Kind lieb hat, der züchtigt es.'

Überhaupt, das war die Summe dieses Lebens: der Bauer hatte das Seine getan, so gut oder so schlecht er es vermochte, in den Grenzen seines Standes, gemäß der Weltanschauung, mit der er geboren und in der er aufgewachsen war."<sup>73</sup>

The pathos of his suicide on the soil into which he has expended his energies and devotion reinforces, with its sentimental appeal, the exemplary quality of Blüttner's life as the honest man's heroic struggle to survive in a hostile environment of change and upheaval:

"Hier war er umgeben von den Zeugen seines Lebens und Wirkens. ...Hier hatte jeder Fußbreit Landes Bedeutung für ihn, jedes Hälmchen erzählte ihm eine Geschichte.<sup>74</sup> ... Es gab ja keinen anderen Weg! Sie hatten ihm alles zerstört, was den Menschen ans Leben fesselt. Richtig hinausgedrängt war er worden aus seinem Besitz, aus allen seinen Rechten.<sup>75</sup> ... Sein Blick flog über die Felder und Wiesen zu seinen Füßen. Das war sein Land, er starb auf seinem Grund und Boden."<sup>76</sup>

In his farmer-hero's bondage to his property Polenz has generalised the myth of the soil to represent the foundation of ethical principles and social organisation. The consequences of separation from the land are without exception negative: moral

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73 Polenz, Der Blüttnerbauer, pp.311-312.

74 Ibid., p.473.

75 Ibid., p.475.

76 Ibid., p.478.



degeneration, urbanisation, and political radicalism. Economic and moral decline go hand in hand, for the loss of the family property signals the disintegration of tradition and moral order. Once he leaves the farm and the strict guidance of his father and becomes Harrassowitz's tenant on a wretched plot of land in a neighbouring village, the lethargy of the elder son and heir, Karl, degenerates into drunkenness and bestiality. One daughter becomes involved in prostitution while the other, infected by the irreverent ideas of her radical companion, the socialist Häschke, defies her father's authority and moves to the city.

The conflict is structured in terms of the opposition between city and countryside. The family property, the fortress of social stability, patriarchal authority, conservatism and morality, as it became also for Gotthelf in his later years, is contrasted with the metropolis which Polenz brands as the nucleus of industrial capitalism and the workers' movement. Büttner's antagonists - Harrassowitz, his financial associate Schönberger and the cunning agent Schmeiß, as well as Count Saland-, the representatives of the new capitalist era, all have their origins in the city, and Gustav's urban cousins persuade their father to refuse help to their rural kin. Similarly, while Polenz in some passages displays a shrewd perception of the mechanism of class relationships, he naively attributes the political radicalism of the industrial proletariat to the loss of their links with the native soil:

"Allen war das eine gemeinsam: die Heimatlosigkeit. Von der Scholle waren sie getrennt, deren mütterlich nährnde Kraft nichts ersetzen kann. Das waren die wirklich Enterbten, denn sie hatten nicht, worauf jeder von Geburts wegen Anspruch hat, ein Stück Erde,

darauf er seine Füße ausruhen, auf dem er leben und sterben darf.... Die Begriffe von Gut und Böse, von Eigentum, Recht und Ordnung mußten sich verschieben und in ihr Gegenteil verkehren für Existenzen, die in der Luft schwebten, die den Zusammenhang mit ihresgleichen, den Boden unter den Füßen, den Untergrund aller Gesellschaft verloren hatten."<sup>77</sup>

The author, then, with some degree of oversimplification reduces the modern phenomenon of worker-alienation through the capitalist production-process to the contrast between city and land.

The process by which the individual, deprived of his rightful inheritance, the family farm, takes the path towards the workers' movement, is illustrated by the development of the Büttnerbauer's son, Gustav.

While he has retained the conservative outlook of the farmer with his instinctive distrust of politics, Gustav, unlike his father, is receptive to modern developments. He is acquainted with rational farming methods, has in Saxony experienced the exploitation of the labourer under the conditions of capitalist production, and witnesses the effectiveness of protest against social injustice. The decisive factor which makes him leave the land, Polenz points out however, is the realisation that, once the family property is no longer his own, there is no future for him on the land:

"... wenn er auf freiem Gute hätte selbständig schalten und walten dürfen als sein eigener Herr, da hätte er wohl jede Arbeit auf sich nehmen wollen, wäre sicher gewesen, etwas Rechtes vor sich zu bringen. Aber so, wo das Glück der Familie vernichtet war! Wo einer hätte wieder ganz von vorn anfangen müssen! wo ihm, dem Bauernsohne, nichts übrig blieb, als sich als Tagelöhner oder Knecht zu verdingen!"<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Polenz, Der Büttnerbauer, p.409.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.454.

Appropriately, the farmer's son's descent into the proletariat is completed in the metropolis. At a workers' meeting he is fired by their sense of common interest and destiny, and finally finds employment in a factory.

The agrarian novel has assumed a pronounced conservative character. The anti-capitalist sentiment and aversion to political life underlying Gotthelf's apocalyptic visions, in his later novels, of the threat to tradition, morality and religion from secularisation, materialism and centralisation, become specific and explicit in Der Büttnerbauer. Polenz's definition of the farmer, founded on a similar ideology of personal property won through personal labour, and the evaluation of the honest worker's unassuming yet purposeful existence against a hostile environment, which, with a distinct agrarian bias, he constructs into a myth of the soil, is extended by the author's realistic appreciation of historical processes and their implications for the individual in society. While their approaches to the agrarian problem differ in emphasis - from Christian doctrine to social realism, the one writing amidst the hesitant modernisation of the state in provincial early nineteenth-century Switzerland, the other in the class society of late nineteenth-century Prussia - the solution Polenz proposes to the social question illustrates the fundamental similarity between their personal and political beliefs.

In Der Büttnerbauer Polenz only hints at the remedy to the agrarian crisis. In order to allay Büttner's mistrust of the Junker and to persuade him to sell his wood, the Count's agent Schroff produces the argument of the occupational solidarity of the landed classes:

"Die Interessen von Bauer und Ritterschaft gehen vielfach Hand in Hand. Schließlich sind es doch verwandte Stände: Grundbesitzer. Die Größe des Besitzes bedeutet keinen so enormen Unterschied."<sup>79</sup>

Here, however, this theory serves as an instrument for the class egoism of the landed aristocracy.

Polenz develops the idea of class harmony through attachment to the soil and an ascetic work-ethic, as an alternative to class rivalry and proletarianisation, in his later novel Der Grabenhäger in which he examines the agrarian problem from the perspective of the Junker. Here Polenz makes the realization of the social ideal dependent on the attitude of the Junker, firstly towards his own workers, and secondly towards his less powerful neighbour, the farmer.

When the Junker Erich von Kriebow relinquishes the decadence of Berlin to take over in person the management of his family estate from a corrupt overseer, the relationship between his caste and the agrarian labourer becomes a matter of personal concern. The workers on the land, he finds, are treated like machines, they have no means to satisfy their intellectual needs, cannot expect ever to possess property of their own, and, as a consequence, degenerate into mental and spiritual atrophy. Their ideals, ambitions, and creativity are stifled and their work becomes a prison. This rootlessness, Polenz shows, leads to discontent and makes a fertile ground for political radicalism, here in the figure of the social-democrat agitator Fritz Wurten who leads a revolt against the ruthless exploiter von Pantin.

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<sup>79</sup> Polenz, Der Blüttnerbauer, p.73.

Responsible for the growing estrangement between the two classes is, for Polenz, the Junker's self-seeking materialism and indifference to his calling. It is significant that the author chooses a pastor, Grützing, as his mouth-piece, for he interprets class conflict not as a structural, but as an ethical problem. Polenz attributes the corrosion of patriarchal interchange, founded on the natural bond to the land through the common calling to till the soil, to greed and the demonic power of money:

"Wo ist denn der patriarchalische Sinn, von dem wir soviel lesen, der zwischen Gutsherren und Arbeitern walten soll? Oder wo ist die christliche Gesinnung, mit der man sich so gern brüstet? Zwischen Herr und Knecht hat sich etwas eingeschlichen, was das gerade Gegenteil ist von hausväterisch christlichem Sinn: der Geschäftsgeiz, die Erwerbsgier. Eine Kluft hat sich aufgetan zwischen zwei Ständen, die ihrem Berufe nach zusammengehören. Wer ist denn die notwendige Ergänzung zum Stande der Gutsbesitzer? doch der Arbeiter, der ihm sein Land bebaut! Aber wo ist denn da noch eine Gemeinsamkeit? Wo ist gegenseitiges Verstehen, Lieben, Achten und Helfen? Wo ist der Brotherr, dem das Wohlergehen seiner Leute ebenso hoch stünde wie sein eigener Vorteil, wie es doch dem Evangelium gemäß wäre. Anstatt dessen; kalte Interessenwirtschaft, Ausbeutung ..."80

The author's means of defusing the radical political potential of the rural proletariat is revealed by the plan of one progressive Junker, Merten, to distribute voluntarily small plots of land to his workers, thereby creating a community of independent farmers under the paternalistic gaze of the Junker and bound in loyalty to the state by the conservative force of property. This alternative, while it testifies to Polenz's concern for the welfare of the lower classes, demonstrates at the same time the limits of his conception of social justice. His demand for social improvement arises not from political commitment but from personal sympathy. He presents, in the

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80 Wilhelm von Polenz, Der Grabenhäuser (Berlin: Egon Fleischel, 1918), p.88.

place of class struggle, a utopian vision of an agrarian front united by attachment to the soil, the resolution of class differences and capitalist exploitation through property ownership, and a return to the patriarchal principles which he, like Gotthelf, considered the foundation of the just Christian society.

The model for the regeneration of the dissolute, irresponsible aristocrat is the middle farmer. Like his counterpart in Der Büttnerbauer Tuleveit is the repository of the traditional values of custom, morality, diligence and thrift:

"Die Tuleveits auf dem Schulzengute hatten durch Generationen hindurch zähe an den Gebräuchen und Sitten der Vorfahren festgehalten. Sie lebten auf bescheidenem Fuße, saßen zu den Mahlzeiten am nämlichen Tische nieder mit ihrem Gesinde, standen im Sommer um vier, im Winter um fünf Uhr auf, gaben ihren Leuten das Beispiel von Sparsamkeit, Nüchternheit und Fleiß, und brachten es auf diese Weise, wenn auch nicht zu Reichtum - das verhinderte der Kinderreichtum -, aber doch zu behäbigem Wohlstande."<sup>81</sup>

His situation, also, parallels that of Traugott Büttner. The owner of the hereditary family property of the "Schulzengut", he is threatened on two fronts: by a Jewish usurer Isidor Feige, and by a class enemy, the Junker family of von Kriebow. The reconciliation of the traditional enmity between the two landowning classes is here achieved however, through the intervention of the present heir of the estate, the enlightened Junker Erich von Kriebow who, determined to make restitution for his forebears' hostility to the farmer, rescues him from the hands of the corrupt dealer.

Polenz's image of the Junker of the future is of an initiator of social reform, foremost in diligence, attached to the soil not by desire for gain but by ethical principles and social responsibility:

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<sup>81</sup> Polenz, Der Grabenhäger, p.223.

"Er wird etwas weniger laut und hochfahrend auftreten, als er es jetzt oft zu tun beliebt, er wird haushälterisch umgehen mit seinem Erbe, er wird seine Anlagen, Gaben und Kräfte nicht vergeuden in liederlichem Hasardieren, er wird sich nicht erniedrigen zur schmachvollen Jagd nach dem Mammon. Er wird kein Prahlhans sein und kein Streber, sondern ein schlichter Edelmann, der sich der Arbeit nicht scheut. So wird der Junker leben, nicht abgeschlossen, sondern mitten drin im Volke und darum nicht minder vornehm. So wird er seines Amtes walten, der Erste in der Gemeinde durch Tüchtigkeit."<sup>82</sup>

This affirmation of the existing social order, not on the basis of economic superiority but according to ability, reflects the author's endeavour to simplify the authority relationships within the capitalist system by reducing class conflict to a question of character and moral worth. Against the progressive Marxist ideology of class struggle between the propertied classes and the proletariat, leading ultimately to social revolution, the conservative Polenz sets the vision of an ethically organised corporate farming community bound by the middle-class ideology of achievement through toil and personal striving, the caritative responsibility of the upper classes, and property ownership as a sign of individual status. The function of this myth of the soil was to suggest a harmony of interests on the land, and thus to stabilise and reinforce existing property relationships.<sup>83</sup>

Where the writer, in an effort to evade contemporary issues, excluded the modern age from his works by abstracting the farmer from his historical context, the agrarian novel became not the vehicle for confrontation with social problems but a means of withdrawal and escape. Polenz's realistic approach was soon lost. It is just such a disregard for the impact of the modern age on the farmer which

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<sup>82</sup> Polenz, Der Grabenhäcker, p.620.

<sup>83</sup> See: Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman, pp.92-93.

characterises the reactionary agrarian idylls of the Austrian journalist Peter Rosegger (1843-1918).

Features of Rosegger's works are the strong didactic purpose and a sentimental view of country life. The subject-matter of his novels, set in the alpine villages of the Steiermark, the scene of his childhood and youth, centres on the same problem as that of his Prussian contemporary Wilhelm von Polenz, namely the impact of industrial capitalism on the farming community.

Jakob der Letzte (1888) tells how the isolated alpine village of Altenmoos dies out when the villagers are persuaded to sell their farms to a millionaire speculator. Their fields are turned into a game reserve and the fate of those who, dissatisfied with the simple life on the land, abandon their roots in the village to seek their fortune in the outside world, is poverty and ruin. Only Jakob Steinreuter, the last of generations of farmers, remains loyal to his lineage and to the soil. Like Traugott Büttner he dies rather than leave his land.

In contrast to Polenz, however, who, recognising the demands of progress, pointed out the dangers of blind adherence to tradition and custom, Rosegger disregards the laws of socio-economic causation and historical necessity, and instead attributes the decline of the community to the fickleness of the villagers who succumb to the corrupting influence of money and the temptations of social betterment and prosperity, thereby betraying their occupation and the traditions



of their class:<sup>84</sup>

"...er verlor seinen festen Bauerncharakter und damit seine Beharrungskraft. Die Krankheiten der Zeit haben ihn erfaßt, die Fahrigkeit, der Größenwahn."<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, while Polenz's moral indictment of the acquisitive spirit of capitalism is in part balanced by an objective appraisal of the historical forces responsible for the farmer's decline, Rosegger's comprehension of modern capitalism as a socio-economic system does not extend beyond moral indignation at the corrupt outside world which begins at the boundary of the village, as illustrated in this emotional account of the destruction of the bucolic idyll:

"Die Ansiedler, arbeitsam und bedürfnislos, hatten sich feste Stätten gegründet, zur Gemeinde zusammengetan, hatten Ordnung und Zucht gehalten, hatten sich in Frieden vertragen und das entlegene Tal zwischen den hohen Bergen und Wildnissen war ein heiteres, gesegnetes Menschenheim geworden für lange Zeit. Draußen in der Welt oft Krieg und Empörung; im Waldlande Arbeit und Frieden. Die Bauern genossen keck ihr gesundes Leben, und wer einmal ein krankes zu tragen hatte, der trug es geduldig. ... Da kam die Pest der neuen Zeit, die Gewinn gier, der Streberwahn, da wurden die Menschen treulos gegen die Heimat und ihre Sitten, jagten hinaus in das Elend der grenzenlosen Welt. Die wenigen Zurückgebliebenen werden erdrückt von dem Eigennutz der Mächtigen."<sup>86</sup>

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84 "Die plane Fabel vom eigennützigem reichen Mann, der die schlichten Bergbauern mit Geld und guten Worten dazu verführt, Haus und Hof zu verlassen, weil er sein Jagdrevier vergrößern will, bringt jedoch weniger die ökonomischen Ursachen des Zerfalls des Bergbauerntums ans Licht, als die politische Ignoranz des mittelständischen Autors, der den alle gesellschaftliche Bereiche durchdringenden Kapitalismus nur im dunklen Ressentiment des Bildungsbürgertums gegen die verderbliche Macht des Geldes, die zudem in der Figur des reichen Industriellen ganz veräußerlicht erscheint, zu begreifen vermag." (Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman, p.75) See also pp.76-77.

85 Peter Rosegger, Jakob der Letzte, eine Waldbauerngeschichte aus unseren Tagen (Leipzig: Staackmann, 1933), pp.8-9. (Foreward)

86 Ibid., p.341. The underscorings are my own.

The difference in perspective was reflected in a variety of solutions.<sup>87</sup> While Polenz, in the polarised rural society of Prussia, envisaged an agrarian front composed of an alliance of all landed classes as a barrier against the transformation of farming life through social and economic change, the implication of Rosegger's ethical approach to the agrarian problem is that, had the villagers not brought about their own downfall, the community would continue to flourish.

Rosegger's vision of an ordered, crisis-free, autonomous existence of social harmony in the rural idyll shows how closely the call for re-agrarianisation in an age of developing industrialisation was linked with reactionary middle-class hopes and expectations of economic security and social stability.<sup>88</sup> The farming life is postulated as being, in itself, unproblematic. Neither the autarchical existence of the alpine farmer nor his traditional methods of production are questioned. On the contrary, Rosegger asserts that Man's proper task is to provide the immediate needs of life with his hands:

"Der Alpenbauer ist überhaupt nicht da, um zu konkurrieren, sondern um auf seinem Boden für sich zu arbeiten und zu leben."<sup>89</sup>

Not only does the author ignore the role of the farmer in the modern world but he idealises the village as the model community free of class antagonisms:

"Kein Herr und kein Sklave, keiner reich und keiner arm war Altenmooser Art."<sup>90</sup>

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87 See: Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman, p.79.

88 "Das von mittelständischer Agrarromantik geprägte Klischee soll auf eine von Ausbeutung, Unterdrückung und Entfremdung freie Alternative zum kapitalistischen Gesellschaftssystem verweisen." (Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman, p.73)

89 Rosegger, Jakob der Letzte, p.9. (Foreward.)

90 Ibid., p.171.

The suggestion of a static harmonious society is reinforced by the geographical isolation of the village. As in Polenz's works social stability is associated with the settledness of attachment to the native soil. Rosegger justifies a return to the land not only as the domain of social harmony and economic independence, but also as a biological imperative:

"Der rechte, echte, feste und treue Mensch muß  
irgendwo wurzeln, nicht anders wie ein Baum, ein  
Kornhalm."<sup>91</sup>

Thus, in Erdsegen (1900), Rosegger portrays the regeneration of a journalist through honest toil in the salutary country environment and marriage with a farmer's daughter.

Again like Polenz Rosegger distributes his sympathies with an agrarian, anti-urban bias, contrasting the decadence of the metropolis with the virtues of country life. In Weltgift (1903) Hadrian Häusler, the son of a wealthy industrial entrepreneur, yet repelled by the ruthless world of commerce and the superficiality of urban culture, seeks spiritual rebirth in nature but, corrupted by the rootlessness of the metropolis, is unable to adapt to the simple rhythm of farm labour. Physical toil and the undemanding existence of the farmer remain foreign to him, for he can see country life only with the romanticising eyes of the city-dweller. The work concludes with the author's uncompromising condemnation of the city and its culture:

"Und uns hat dieses Schicksal gezeigt, daß ein Mensch,  
dessen Seele von Weltgift zerfressen ist, nicht in  
die ländliche Natur zurückkehren kann und soll."<sup>92</sup>

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91 Rosegger, Jakob der Letzte, p.111

92 Peter Rosegger, Weltgift (Leipzig: Staackmann, 1933), p.341.

The conflicts in these works are constructed according to the crass polarity between nature and civilisation, the farming community and the outside world, or, to take the titles of two of his novels, "Erdsegen" and "Weltgift". Rosegger posits the simple, pious, diligent life in harmony with nature as the best possible form of existence and generalises the Austrian farming community to represent the model for the regeneration of modern humanity and the return of Man to his origins:

"Die Menschheit steht nirgends so festgegründet, als im Bauerntum, und dieses nirgends so tief als in den Bergen.... Das Bauerntum, dieser Granit der Menschheit ...<sup>93</sup> Aus der Scholle sprießt Kraft für die ganze Welt und Segen für den, der sie berührt."<sup>94</sup>

The association of a simple rural existence with traditional conceptions of fulfilment through individual striving and with freedom from economic constraints and social pressures evinced, even in the largely provincial Austria, a will to deny the facts of historical development, and represented an attempt to re-establish values and principles no longer tenable at the time of writing. Rosegger's uncritical glorification of farming life and unqualified rejection of modern civilisation make his works, in their lack of social relevance, extreme examples of the provincialism of "Heimatkunst", and showed the way to the mythologisation of the farmer and the mystical notion of the soil which were to become essential features of the "Blut und Boden" literature of the Weimar Republic and National Socialist era.

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93 Peter Rosegger, Erdsegen. Vertrauliche Sonntagsbriefe eines Bauernknechts (Leipzig: Staackmann, 1933), p.325.

94 Ibid., pp.389-390.

## GUSTAV FRENSSEN

While Polenz and Rosegger wrote as spokesmen for specifically agrarian interests, the romantic quest for a national identity, the mainspring of the "Volk" idea which spread under the impact of industrial development - the creation of social tensions, the anonymity and alienation of the individual in modern civilisation, and the opening of Germany to international influences -, formed the background to an extended definition of the farmer within the context of a bourgeois national ideology. The agrarian novel which became the vehicle for this German nationalism did not idealise the countryside but created a German myth by which traditional conservative farming values were constructed into a national morality. The idyllic presentation of farming life made way for the heroic vision. Gustav Frenssen's Jörn Uhl (1901), which was an immediate success and became the first bestseller of this century,<sup>95</sup> undoubtedly played an important part in popularising this new image of the farmer.

The works of Gustav Frenssen (1863-1945) are marked by the author's strong national consciousness, Germanic piety, a conventional petit-bourgeois morality, and a reverence for tradition and his native Low German soil. He describes himself, with typical affectation, as:

"Ein Künstler, ein unpolitischer Mensch, aber die große Linie haltend. Das deutsche Volk aus Blut und Boden gesund zu sehn, durch die angeborne Frömmigkeit einig und stark, den schlichten Deutschen in seiner Seele reich zu zeigen, den Hochgebildeten und Wohlhabenden schlicht, vor Gott und seiner Seele nicht mehr als jener, ist die Grundursache wie das Grundwesen meines Lebenswerks gewesen."<sup>96</sup>

95 See Karlheinz Roszbacher's analysis of the reception of Jörn Uhl in: Heimatkunstabewegung und Heimatroman, pp.243-250.

96 Gustav Frenssen, Lebensbericht (Berlin: Grote, 1940), p.313.

Later he was to make no secret of his support for the National Socialist movement,<sup>97</sup> was honoured by Hitler, and his best-known work, Jörn Uhl, was included in the regime's authorised literature.

Frenssen states that this book was prompted by personal experience and the memory of his own origins.<sup>98</sup> For the village pastor who had grown up as the poor son of a tradesman, the prosperous farmers on the fertile marshland of Schleswig - Holstein were ceaseless objects of wonder, and thus their wantonness a cause of concern:

"Die Erzählung 'Jörn Uhl' hat in den wirtschaftlichen Zuständen meines Heimatkirchspiels und in den Erlebnissen meiner Kindheit ihren Grund. Da ich ein armes Handwerkerkind war, waren die Bauern-Großbauern, schöne, stolze und kluge Leute-immer das Ziel meiner frühreifen Gedanken.... Es war mir völlig rätselhaft und unheimlich, daß sie, alle aus alten Familien, Kinder nüchternen und vorsichtiger niedersächsischer Bauernsippen, während das ganze Kirchspiel wußte, daß ihr rastloses und üppiges Leben unmöglich Bestand haben könnte, dennoch in dieser Lebensweise fortführen und sich so von Jahr zu Jahr der Gefahr näherten, ihre Höfe verlassen zu müssen, die mir - wie noch heute - das Herrlichste auf der ganzen Welt waren."<sup>99</sup>

Jörn Uhl, in plot and sentiment a close counterpart of Hermann Sudermann's Frau Sorge (1887),<sup>100</sup> is the story of a Dithmarsch farmer's struggle to save his property from ruin.

Jörn's mother dies early and, at the age of twelve, he assumes responsibility for the management of the farm (the "Uhl") which is neglected by his dissolute father and brothers. Out of a compelling sense of duty he struggles alone to save the property which is

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97 "So hat der Schein der nationalsozialen Idee, die Idee der Einigkeit unsres Volkes in einem religiös-politischen, deutschen Bekenntnis und Willen, von meiner Kindheit bis in mein Alter mein ganzes Leben begleitet." (Frenssen, Lebensbericht, p.316)

98 See: Rossbacher, Heimatkunstbewegung und Heimatroman, pp.82-84.

99 Frenssen, Lebensbericht, pp. 116-117.

100 Frau Sorge, however, lacks the strong nationalist emphasis of Frenssen's novel.

burdened with mortgage and debt, and in so doing must suppress his natural hunger for learning. In the Franco-Prussian war he is wounded and on returning to the farm meets a succession of troubles. The Uhl is threatened by bankruptcy, his sister has run off with a good-for-nothing, his first wife dies and his drunken brother hangs himself. A catastrophic plague of mice destroys the wheat crop, Jörn's last hope of rescuing the farm, and not long afterwards the Uhl is struck by lightning and burns to the ground. The destruction of the Uhl is the climax of the hero's setbacks and the culmination of his suffering, yet heralds his rebirth. Now free to follow his natural inclinations he successfully completes his studies, becomes an engineer, and marries his childhood comrade Lisbeth Junker.

From the outset the author establishes the superiority of his hero according to racial criteria. A clear-sighted view of life, we are told, he has inherited from his mother, one of the Thiessen lineage from the moor, while his depraved father Klaus and brothers come from the Uhl clan on the march. Together with the Thiessen temperament Jörn Uhl is endowed with another positive attribute: the attachment of the farmer to the soil. The Uhls are prosperous, powerful and arrogant landowners, in contrast to the Kreien, a nomadic trading folk notorious for their deceitful dealings. These clans differ not only in their way of life - the one tied to the native soil, the other rootless and rumoured to be of gypsy stock - but also in their physical characteristics: the Germanic Uhls are blond while the inferior Kreien are red-headed. Frenssen does however qualify this contrast by making Jörn's closest friend Fiete Krey.

By investing his hero with racial ingredients Frenssen lends his struggle, as we shall see, special value.

The agrarian crisis arises here not from external factors but from character weakness: mismanagement and immorality. Possible socio-economic causes, such as class rivalry, industrial development, competition, or the capitalist transformation of agriculture are not considered. In this Frenssen continues the tendency we have observed in the nineteenth-century agrarian novel to set values rather than state facts, to emphasise the force of personality rather than social determination.

The Uhl stock, which manifests itself in Jörn's sense of obligation to the soil and in a moral responsibility to earn the right to property by hard work, has weakened, we are told, from one generation to the next. In the figure of Klaus Uhl the author condemns the irresponsibility of the march farmers whose land is neglected while they enjoy a degenerate life of superficial pleasures. The values to which Jörn pledges himself, the traditional code of farming virtues "Arbeiten und nüchtern sein und sparsam und klug wirtschaften ...",<sup>101</sup> and his compelling sense of honour and duty, distinguish him from the futile characters round him.

The construction of the farmer-hero as a model figure through racial attributes, attachment to the native soil, and personality, is reinforced by the formation of his character through trials and experience (the process of "Bildung"). In his novel, as we shall see, Frenssen extends by the nationalist ingredient the bourgeois ideal of social advancement and acceptance within a strictly defined ethical framework. The North German farmer's local allegiance to heredity and environment is associated by the author with the positive

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101 Frenssen, Jörn Uhl (Berlin: Grotesche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1904), p.129.



qualities of conformity and patriotism.

Jörn's selfless toil and persistence in depressing circumstances against a hostile environment are attributed patriotic value. Just as he fulfils his duty as farmer on the Uhl, so he defends his nation with a sense of civic duty. The power of the "Volk" is shown to arouse the patriotic sentiments of the hero and arm him spiritually for the national struggle:

"Da sah Jörn Uhl noch einmal auf, und sah all die ziehenden Menschen, die alle nach einem Ziele strebten, und fühlte die Größe der Zeit."<sup>102</sup>

And Frenssen presents the vision of a return to peaceful undisturbed toil on the land after the defeat of the aggressor:

"Wenn sie uns nicht in Ruhe lassen wollen, dann müssen wir sie erst schlagen; dann kann man nachher wieder pflügen."<sup>103</sup>

In the personal sphere, however, the hero must acknowledge the farming life as an error. For Jörn Uhl the farm represents suffering and deprivation. The hard physical labour dulls his spirit, his horizons become narrowed to the everyday affairs of the Uhl, he becomes increasingly introverted, and his virtuousness and self-discipline border on the morbid. Only the fortuitous destruction of the Uhl and the death of his father release him from his obligations:

" Ich lasse die Uhl nun fahren, samt allen ihren Sorgen. Ich bin ein Mensch ... ich habe in fünfzehn Jahren keinen Sonntag gehabt; ich glaube, ich bin ein armer, unglücklicher Narr gewesen ... Aber nun ... ich will sehen, daß ich meine Seele wiederbekomme, die hier in der Uhl gesteckt hat."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Frenssen, Jörn Uhl, p.255. Underscoring indicates italics in the original.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p.245.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p.411.

Jörn Uhl thus represents a new type of hero in the agrarian novel: the farmer who, in his private search for happiness, aspires to leave the land:

"Landmann möchte ich nicht werden, ganz und gar nicht. Aber in den Büchern möchte ich arbeiten, immerzu."<sup>105</sup>

The separation of the farmer from his land does not, therefore, mark his downfall as it does that of Polenz's Büttnerbauer or Rosegger's Jakob. Not the agrarian but the industrial sphere is the scene for the fulfilment of the hero, for only after the destruction of the farm is Jörn Uhl able to leave the land to attend the university and become an industrial engineer. This new emphasis on industrial expansion and progress in the agrarian novel is evidence of Frenssen's acknowledgement of the modern age, and reinforces Peter Zimmermann's argument, which he supports with statistical evidence of comparative popularity, that the substitution of a liberal for the agrarian conservative perspective of the Polenz-Rosegger novels was in keeping with the author's intention to create an identification figure for the urban public.<sup>106</sup> Optimistic liberalism has taken the place of cultural pessimism.

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<sup>105</sup> Frenssen, Jörn Uhl, p.102.

<sup>106</sup> "Der unterschiedliche Erfolg erhärtet ... die ... Vermutung, daß es sich bei den Lesern der Bauern- und Heimatkunsliteratur vorwiegend um ein städtisch-bürgerliches Publikum gehandelt hat, und läßt den Schluß zu, daß dieses Publikum gerade jene Romane mit interessierter Aufmerksamkeit und damit auch mit hohen Verkaufsquoten honorierte, die die bürgerliche Gesellschaft in ihren Grundwerten bestätigten, anstatt bäuerliche Probleme und Nöte zu thematisieren und die Gesellschaft aus der agrarischen Ecke zu attackieren." (Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman, p.124)

See also: Rosbacher, Heimatkunstabewegung und Heimatroman, pp.193-194.

As we have seen, the author makes emancipation from the farming existence the condition for Jörn's fulfilment. Yet this physical separation by no means implies the loss of the spiritual ties with the native soil. He leaves the land as an occupation but not as a source of values. The term "Bauer" is, in short, a cipher for the "völkisch" view of life.

As the absence of agrarian background in the novel suggests, Jörn Uhl is not a social type but a compendium of "völkisch" farming virtues-dutifulness, industriousness and perseverance-which are translated into the non-farming sphere. Attachment to the soil remains, as an ethical and patriotic value, the source of his accomplishments as soldier and engineer. In the description of his hero as "ein lateinischer Bauer"<sup>107</sup> Frenssen suggests the union of the two qualities of duty to the native soil and, by association, to the "Volk", and individual endeavour. Referring to the hero's calling as an engineer, the author again, in the words of Jörn Uhl, links the two spheres:

"Er wird den Zeichenstift führen wie einen Spaten,  
und den Zirkel herumwerfen wie einen Schwungflug ..."<sup>108</sup>

The farmer Jörn Uhl is finally free to assume his task as builder of the German power and prestige displayed by the North Sea canal. For the urban public the modern state thereby appeared as the creation of ancestral German farming stock or, as Karlheinz Roszbacher refers to it, a "Verschmelzung von Bauernblut und Industrialisierungswillen."<sup>109</sup> This is emphasised by the legendary dimension Frenssen gives his hero, making one character describe him as:

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107 Frenssen, Jörn Uhl, p.464. See also p.519: "Halb ist es ein Gelehrter und halb ein Bauer."

108 Ibid., p.475.

109 Roszbacher, Heimatkunstabewegung und Heimatroman, p.193.

"... ein rechter Nachkomme ... von jenen Bauern, welche auf eigene Faust Meer und Land und Sterne studierten, und welche Deiche bauten, die hielten, und Schiffe, die der Nordsee widerstanden, und welche die Lippen zusammenpreßten, bis sie schmal wurden, und sich aus Neugier und Ehrfurcht eine Weltanschauung bauten, mit der ein ernster Mensch wohl hausen kann."<sup>110</sup>

The coincidence of national and individual interests which is demonstrated by the hero's development (self-realisation and service to the state coincide in Jörn's capacity as engineer) is reinforced by his passivity. The moral and patriotic value of obedience to an undefined authority is illustrated by the plot.

The workings of fate are designed to demonstrate not merely socio-ethical conventions but the involvement of the individual in the national destiny.

Jörn's personality is, as I have mentioned, traced by the author to heredity and environment, and events beyond his control (the plague of mice, war, fire) are shown to determine the course of his life.<sup>111</sup> The exaggerated virtuousness and sentimental self-abnegation of the hero in his futile struggle to rescue the family property are designed to enhance further the value of his task. This attachment to the soil Frenssen invests with patriotic value.

It is this very attitude of willing endurance, then, which Frenssen makes a formative factor in the education of the individual. The author brings the hero to this insight at the conclusion of the novel. True to the pattern of bourgeois idealism the hero has attained social recognition and success through his own resources, and his good will and self-denial have been rewarded. He reflects finally that it is not possible to understand the workings of fate

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<sup>110</sup> Frenssen, Jörn Uhl, p.480.

<sup>111</sup> See: Rossbacher, Heimatkunstabewegung und Heimatroman, p.156 ff.

and that one must simply believe that all life has meaning:

"Wir sollen aber das beste Zutrauen haben, daß  
alles einen inwendigen, guten Sinn und Zweck hat."<sup>112</sup>

In a similar tone of humility Jörn Uhl sums up his life:

"... obgleich er zwischen Sorgen und Särgen  
hindurch mußte, er war dennoch ein glücklicher  
Mann. Darum, weil er demütig war und Vertrauen  
hatte."<sup>113</sup>

Frenssen's novel illustrates the political implications of this disposition<sup>114</sup> in the context of Wilhelmine nationalism. Through the development of his dutiful farmer-hero the author has created a German bourgeois myth of national cohesion founded on conservative farming values, which appealed to patriotic sentiment and conformed to expectations of achievement through personal striving and endurance, and hopes of social status. Given German industrial and commercial expansion following unification, with its social and political consequences - the division of labour and capital, the growth of the working classes, and class conflict - Frenssen's idealisation of the Wilhelmine state in terms of the citizen's self-abnegation, diligence and heroic perseverance represented a refusal to recognise the workings of historical development, and a disregard for the forces of political power and for social movements. In the combination of political detachment and local patriotism - the state appears to the hero only in the guise of the mystical "Volk", never as political authority - ideological reassurance and indoctrination coincide. In this way Frenssen translated the ethos of labour and endurance into an attitude of

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112 Frenssen, Jörn Uhl, p.394.

113 Ibid., p.525. Underscoring indicates italics in the original.

114 See Roszbacher's analysis of the psychological correlation between submission to destiny and subjection to authority. (Roszbacher, Heimatkunstabewegung und Heimatroman, pp.179-182)

conformity and subordination which necessarily concluded in the legitimization of the authoritarian Wilhelmine state and society.

The popularity<sup>115</sup> of two other novels of this period, Hermann Burte's Wiltfeber der ewige Deutsche (1912) and Hermann Löns's Der Wehrwolf (1910), in which variations of Frenssen's "völkisch" hero reappear - the amalgamation of conservative farming values (the myth of the soil as the German "Heimat" and the attachment to the soil as a racial - ethical principle), patriotic sentiment and German personality-, suggests that this Germanic ideology was widely accepted in the early years of the century. A brief study of the influence of these works on the development of the agrarian novel seems therefore instructive.

The writing of Hermann Burte<sup>116</sup> (1879-1960) is marked by the author's sense of German destiny. Wiltfeber, in this respect typical, exemplifies, as Alexander von Bormann points out, the tendency of German writers in the early years of the century to associate politics with ideology in the evocation of the German personality and to see themselves as harbingers of the "völkisch" message:

"Am Beispiel des Romans 'Wiltfeber' von Hermann Burte läßt sich zeigen, wie weitgehend die Ausbildung einer völkischen Weltanschauung als dichterische Aufgabe begriffen und wahrgenommen wurde ..."<sup>117</sup>

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115 Admittedly, the popularity of Frenssen's and Löns's novels (Jörn Uhl [1939]: 463,000: Der Wehrwolf [1939]: 565,000) greatly surpassed that of Burte's work (Wiltfeber der ewige Deutsche [1940]: 74,000). This can be attributed to the mystical and anti-bourgeois tenor of the novel. (The figures are taken from Donald Richards, The German Bestseller in the 20th Century. A complete Bibliography and Analysis 1915-1940. [Bern: Herbert Lang, 1968])

116 Proper name Hermann Strübe.

117 Alexander von Bormann, "Vom Traum zur Tat. Über völkische Literatur," in: Wolfgang Rothe (ed.), Die deutsche Literatur in der Weimarer Republik (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1974), p.318.

The novel tells of the German hero's return after years of travel to his home village and of the changes he discovers there.

While it is not strictly an agrarian novel in as far as the hero is not a farmer, Wiltfeber is built on a similar cult of the "völkisch" personality as Frenssen's Jörn Uhl. The assertion of German character is here, however, accompanied by an uncompromising rejection of conventional assumptions and ethics. Through his mouth-piece, the super-individualist Wiltfeber, Burte attacks various aspects of "democratic" culture, especially bourgeois mediocrity and philistinism, as being alien to the German spirit. The illusion of freedom from the confines of modern materialist class society is created not by a glorification of the simple farming existence with its associations of acceptance and conformity, but by the exaggerated self-assertion of the "völkisch" personality which Burte establishes as an autonomous, absolute value. Wiltfeber, who represents the German ideal of physical and spiritual excellence, is doomed to suffer in a society which worships the norm. The value of the individual's tragic isolation (he rejects the alternative - marriage to his beloved and a farming life) is set against a social hierarchy determined by wealth and prestige. As in Frenssen's novel the exceptional hero is impelled by a self-imposed sense of obligation and service to an undefined authority, in Jörn Uhl to a conception of personal, family and national honour, here to a sacred German mission, a Germanic Christianity sown with Nietzschean elitism.

The "völkisch" qualities of Wiltfeber, as of Jörn Uhl, are shown to derive from his attachment to the native soil.<sup>118</sup> The ancient farmhouse of the hunter Wilhelm Wittich is described as an

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<sup>118</sup> See: Bormann, "Vom Traum zur Tat", p.318.

island of tradition and the past amidst the degeneracy and mediocrity of the modern age.<sup>119</sup> The decline of Wiltfeber's home village is attributed, among other factors, to the flight from the land, the source of creativity, to the city, the "steinerne Verwesungsstätte".<sup>120</sup> The fate of the "Volk" is bound mystically to the German soil:

"Auch Wiltfeber ist los von der Scholle; aber sein Geist blieb über dem Acker, wie der Dampf in der Frühe aus dem Furchen steigt."<sup>121</sup>

The evolutionary concept of a natural biological hierarchy based on an organic attachment to the soil, as a justification of existing property relationships, is set against the revolutionary principles of class conflict, democracy and materialism in an account of the farmer Behringer's expropriation at the hands of the socialist agitator Sailer.<sup>122</sup>

This brief examination of Burte's novel is sufficient to illustrate the recurrence of typical motifs of the conservative agrarian ideology: the myth of the soil as an ethical principle with elitist, anti-capitalist and anti-socialist connotations, anti-urban polemic, cultural pessimism (Burte's apocalyptic portrayal of a doomed civilisation), the rejection of the present for a glorious past, a

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119 Hermann Burte, Wiltfeber der ewige Deutsche. Die Geschichte eines Heimatsuchers (Leipzig: Haessel, 1928), p.62.

120 Ibid., p.50.

121 Ibid., p.70.

122 In view of its strongly anti-egalitarian sentiment and affirmation of a harmonious society founded on biological principles, it is interesting to note that, with a significant increase in the late 1930's i.e. in the immediate pre-war years under National Socialism, almost twice as many copies had been sold of this episode under the title "Vom Hofe, welcher unterging", as a publication in its own right, as of the novel itself. See: Richards, The German Bestseller in the 20th Century, p.113.



high estimation of individual striving with associations of freedom from forms of modern determination, and social conservatism.

The culmination of the hero's development reveals, however, an important shift in emphasis. Burte's novel illustrates the radicalisation of conservative ideology and marks the transition from the exposition of social values to the demonstration of racial principles. While Frenssen constructs in the diligent and submissive farmer-hero Jörn Uhl an obvious identification figure, Burte's character remains an ideal abstraction. Jörn Uhl finally achieves social and national recognition in constructive labour for the state. Burte, however, denies the possibility of compromise with the modern world, and has the social outcast Wiltfeber reach personal fulfilment only in death, when he is united with Ursula, the symbol of the German spirit. The author rejects the petit-bourgeois solution of honest toil and willing endurance in withdrawal from a hostile world. In uncompromising devotion to the sacred German mission the hero chooses instead to perish for the "völkisch" ideal.

The political implications of this ideological transformation are unmistakable in Hermann Löns's saga<sup>123</sup> Der Wehrwolf (1910), an amalgamation of the author's feeling for nature, anti-bourgeois penchant for heroism, and fierce nationalism.<sup>124</sup>

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123 The re-shaping of historical material became a favourite literary device to lend authenticity to the racial myth. For example, Will Vespers Das harte Geschlecht (1931), a saga of revenge set in Scandinavia, describes the beginnings of the Nordic race, and Josefa Berens-Totenohl's Der Femhof (1934), set in the Sauerland, tells of blood struggles in the fourteenth century.

124 See Roszbacher's biography of Löns (1866-1914) in Heimatkunstbewegung und Heimatroman, pp.87-88.

In Löns's novel the farmers on the Lüneburg Heath, unable to persist in their untroubled farming existence, leave their ploughs and band together to defend their homeland against marauders during the Thirty Years' War.

Ideals of self-reliance and exclusiveness are here extended to the racial group. The struggle of the farmer against the system or authority, represented by the power of money, bureaucratic control, industrial development, judicial formalism or the city, is recast here as the struggle of the racial "Volksgemeinschaft" against the inroads of alien blood. The crisis is not of a specifically agrarian character, but arises from a situation of national danger.<sup>125</sup>

The "Heimat" is not simply a territorial concept but a racial notion, for the farmers are sworn to conserve the purity of their stock:

"Und anjetzt wollen wir uns verbrüdern auf Not und Tod, Gut und Blut, daß alle für einen stehen, und einer für alle, aber wir alle für alles, was um und im Bruche leben tut und unserer Art ist."<sup>126</sup>

- and perform their slaughter under the motto:

"Besser fremdes Blut am Messer, als ein fremdes Messer im eigenen Blut!"<sup>127</sup>

The common enemy is all those homeless wanderers who cross their boundaries:

"... was nicht hierher gehört, was im Lande herumzieht und raubt und stiehlt, was Menschen schindet und Häuser ansteckt, das ist Raubzeug und muß auch so behandelt werden."<sup>128</sup>

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125 See: Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman, p.124.

126 Hermann Löns, Der Wehrwolf. Eine Bauernchronik (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1912), p.95.

127 Ibid., p.33.

128 Ibid., p.56.

In Löns's novel aggression is vindicated with the argument of historical necessity. Indiscriminate brutality is justified by the intrusion of hostile outsiders into the agrarian idyll:

"Lieber wäre es uns ja, wir könnten so leben wie früher, unsere Arbeit in Frieden tun und Gott loben. Aber das ist nun einmal nicht anders ... Schimpf um Schimpf, Schlag um Schlag, Blut um Blut, daran wollen wir festhalten, auf das es uns gut geht und wir lange leben auf Erden!"<sup>129</sup>

The right of revenge and God's approval - "Helf dir selber, so hilft dir unser Herre Gott"<sup>130</sup> - are invoked to add legitimacy to the war, and Löns applies Darwinist principles of natural selection to justify the farmers' disregard for moral scruples:

"... denn erstens sind es keine richtigen Menschen, und außerdem, warum bleiben sie nicht, wo sie hingehören."<sup>131</sup>

The patently military qualities of the farmers, while justified in the novel by the demands of self-defence and qualified by their nostalgia for peace, distinguish Löns's characters from the passivity of Frenssen's hero and demonstrate the author's substitution of racial-combative virtues for the civil, bourgeois ideals of acceptance and conformity.

From the conservative vision of an agrarian block united by shared attachment to the soil as a barrier to capitalism and political radicalism, Löns has created the racial farming community pledged to protect their native blood and soil. The sense of shared danger and destiny is heightened by the impression of class harmony in the "Volksgemeinschaft":

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129 Löns, Der Wehrwolf, p.56.

130 Ibid., p.88.

131 Ibid., p.28.

"Es gab keine Bauern und keine Knechte und keine  
Bäuerin und keine Mägde in Peerhobstel, es war  
eine Gemeinde fleißiger Leute, von denen jeder  
für sich und alle für das Gesamt schanzten, so  
daß es auf den Dörfern um das Bruch hieß:  
'Einig wie die Peerhobstler!'"<sup>132</sup>

The biological definition of the farmer, not in terms of  
unyielding individualism but of a communal ethos, illustrates the  
anti-bourgeois tenor of Löns's novel. He presents not an idyllic  
vision of fulfilment through toil and endurance but a heroic account  
of sacrifice for the national cause, for Löns's definition of the  
farmer in his racial singularity accepts the precedence of national  
interests before individual ambitions.

The process of integration into the racial totality is  
exemplified by the development of the farmer Harm Wulf. At first the  
farmer tries to isolate himself from events in the outside world in  
a secure domestic existence. But this, Löns demonstrates, is not  
his task, for the individual must recognise his homeland's destiny as  
his own. The slaughter of his family opens his eyes to the necessity  
of personal involvement as a patriotic duty and he becomes the  
leader of the local vigilantes. As in Jörn Uhl where the farmer-  
hero must leave his land to defend his nation in war, so loyalty to  
the soil as the German "Heimat" is here equated with duty to the  
race. The tasks of the farmer and the soldier, which were in the  
earliest times of settlement inseparable:

"Wenn der Bauer pflügte, hatte er währenddem den  
Speer und die Armbrust bei seiner Jacke liegen..."<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Löns, Der Wehrwolf, p.136.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p.4.

- now once again coincide in the context of the "Volksgemeinschaft".<sup>134</sup>

Löns's novel, therefore, adds an important dimension to the myth of the soil. Gotthelf's farmer was tied to the soil by an ethical bond, the Büttnerbauer by the sentimental links of tradition and the past, Jörn Uhl by ethical - national principles. Löns invests his farmers' bondage to the soil with chauvinist sentiment and a sense of racial identity. The association of the destiny of the farmer with that of the race, and the projection of racial exclusiveness and homogeneity into the farming community, makes Der Wehrwolf a notable forerunner of the later "Blut und Boden" literature.

The notion of the nation as a farming "Volk" is extended in Löns's work by the application of biological criteria (the national-chauvinist conception of the racial community) and translated through the argument of historical necessity into a legitimization of militarism. In its emphasis on race, the display of military virtues and the submergence of the individual in the "Volk", Löns's work undoubtedly not only contributed to the mobilisation of the German public in preparation for the First World War, but even more,

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134 Peter Zimmermann examines in detail the identification of these roles in the "Volk" hero in Der Bauernroman, pp.132-142. See also Zimmermann's article "Kampf um den Lebensraum. Ein Mythos der Kolonial - und der Blut-und-Boden-Literatur", in: Horst Denkler and Karl Prömm, Die deutsche Literatur im Dritten Reich. Themen, Traditionen, Wirkungen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1976), pp.165-182, and Werner Luis's dissertation Das Bauerntum im grenz - und volksdeutschen Roman der Gegenwart (Diss. Münster, 1940).

its popularity under fascism<sup>135</sup>, furthered by political authority<sup>136</sup>, provided ideological underpinning for the aggressive expansionist policy<sup>137</sup> and virulent racism of the National Socialist regime. The image of the farmer as soldier, moreover, conformed to Hitler's vision of a fighting peasantry.<sup>138</sup>

These two works, Wiltfeber der ewige Deutsche and Der Wehrwolf, are the issues of Frenssen's novel. The application of biological theory to the agrarian ideology - the perpetuation of the myth of the soil as the source of racial superiority, and the definition of the individual as the "Volk" hero, by inference the

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- 135 The increase in sales of all three works in question (Jörn Uhl, Wiltfeber der ewige Deutsche and Der Wehrwolf) under National Socialism was most dramatic in the case of Löns's novel.

	<u>Jörn Uhl</u>	<u>Wiltfeber der ewige Deutsche</u>	<u>Der Wehrwolf</u>
1915-20	271,000	25 Editions	90,000
1921-25	288,000	-	271,000
1926-30	362,000	40,000	351,000
1931-35	416,000	69,000	440,000
1936-40	463,000	74,000	565,000

The figures are taken from: Richards, The German Bestseller in the 20th Century, pp.113, 132, 178.

- 136 See: Dietrich Strothmann, Nationalsozialistische Literaturpolitik. Ein Beitrag zur Publizistik im Dritten Reich (Bonn: Bouvier, 1968). Frenssen, Burte and Löns all were recognised and their works promoted by the National Socialists.
- 137 Similar assumptions of the inherent superiority of the German race, the biological worth of the farmer, and of the nation as a 'Bauernvolk' are constructed into an argument for imperialist expansion in Hans Grimm's Volk ohne Raum (1926). Grimm advances the theory that the solution to the social problem (the urban proletariat created by industrialisation) and the creation of an agrarian basis lie in the acquisition of living-space for a surplus of population. Expansion, here, is to be directed not, as it was for the National Socialists, towards Eastern Europe, but towards colonies in Africa. See: Zimmermann, "Kampf um den Lebensraum. Ein Mythos der Kolonial - und der Blut-und-Boden-Literatur".
- 138 See page 78 of this study.

loyal subject of that National Socialist state which claimed to be the political expression of the "Volk" - was a logical development from Frenssen's Jörn Uhl. His construction of a patriotic identification figure had given the agrarian perspective of the conservative novel a bourgeois-national emphasis. The biological myth of the eternal German farmer, which explicitly substituted racial for social identity, and reduced political, social and economic problems to questions of blood and territory, grew out of a similar refusal to recognise the course of historical development.

## "VÖLKISCHE IDEOLOGIE" AND NATIONAL SOCIALISM

"Völkische Ideologie", which had its roots in the conservative and nationalist theories of the late nineteenth century as propagated, among others, by Paul de Lagarde, Julius Langbehn and Adolf Bartels, took on a radical form and a wider mass appeal<sup>139</sup> in the political, economic and social crises of the Weimar Republic. The deterioration of the economic situation and social status of the middle classes through the loss of their savings in the post-war inflation of 1919-1923, renewed indebtedness through the energetic investment of the following period, and the poverty and unemployment caused by the Depression of 1929-1932 accelerated the polarisation of industrialised society. Their reaction to the economic and social dilemma - unable to compete in production with a capitalist bourgeoisie and threatened from below by an increasingly class-conscious proletariat - was a turn to social conservatism and a social ideal of harmony and community transcending class interests. In his study of conservative ideology in the Weimar Republic Herman Lebovics gives this appraisal of the middle-class mentality as a desire to escape from the harsh present into an idealised and glorified past:

"As a response of the German middle classes to the growth of industrial economy and society social conservatism was in large measure an attempt to revitalize and to update a view of society deemed by many long dead. Its proponents tried to breathe

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139 "Der Abwehrcharakter der völkischen Ideologie, die im ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert vor allem von den ökonomisch und gesellschaftlich bedrohten Schichten des Mittelstandes entwickelt worden war, entsprach jetzt einem allgemeinen Bewußtseinsstand." (Heide Gerstenberger, Der revolutionäre Konservatismus. Ein Beitrag zur Analyse des Liberalismus (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1969), p.112.



new life into the old dreams of an agrarian idyll, of an aristocratic morality, of corporate harmony, of national grandeur, and of crisis-free existence. They blamed the evils of the twentieth century on liberalism and capitalism as the agencies of social change which had destroyed the good society of the past - a society which none of them had really known. In their eyes, socialism and communism were even more culpable, for their adherents not only accepted the mode, the direction, and the pace of economic and social change but even wished to intensify these trends. Republican government had failed to protect the economic interests or salve the longings for status of the middle classes; it, too, had to be destroyed."<sup>140</sup>

Linked with this romantic vision of harmony, community, simplicity and order was a call for re-agrarianisation and the conception of the farming community as the model for the "Volksgemeinschaft". For the "völkisch" theorists the conflicts within the modern state were not only the product of an interaction of social and economic factors but a racial and ideological problem. While the contemporary age represented a denial of their dreams, they conceived the future in terms of an idealised past of national greatness, invested with the imagined norms and values of pre-industrial society. This ideology found its political expression in the National Socialist agrarian programme.

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<sup>140</sup> Herman Lebovics, Social Conservatism and the Middle Classes in Germany 1914-1933 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp217-218. Underscoring indicates italics in the original.

While middle-class resentment helped to create the atmosphere for the promotion of extreme solutions to political, economic and social problems, the sudden electoral success of the extremist parties in 1930, especially of the National Socialists, must be ascribed directly to the political disunity and economic chaos of the Depression. Not only did the National Socialists offer an - albeit confused - programme of social revolution as the alternative to the modern state, but they promised also through "bread" and "labour" to redress immediately pressing social grievances - poverty and unemployment - which moderate Republican parties had failed to resolve.

Within the fascist economic vision, founded as it was on the premise of Aryan superiority, agriculture was assigned a privileged position, for the role of the farmer was to be twofold: to feed the nation, and to provide the biological (Aryan) substance for the renewal of the "Volk". With this goal in view the National Socialist agrarian programme was directed towards the promotion of an economically stable and racially pure agricultural sector.

The Hereditary Farm Law ("Erbhofgesetz"), which came into force in October 1933, was designed to stabilise land tenure and thereby conserve the purity of the lineage. All farms between 7.5 and 125 hectares (approximately thirty-seven per cent of the total rural land area<sup>141</sup>) were to be transferred from one generation to the next by an order of succession based on the rights of the male heir who was, of course, to be of Aryan descent. The National Socialist concept of property was thus inseparable from that of race:

"Der germanische Begriff des Eigentums ist von dem germanischen Grundgedanken der Familie als einer Geschlechter-Folge gar nicht zu trennen."<sup>142</sup>

The inalienable right of the farmer to his inherited property (the "Erbhof") was reinforced by regulations to remove the indebtedness, especially as a result of credit and mortgage, of the agricultural sector through the lowering of interest rates on credit, cheap labour, and protective tariffs.

The furtherance of the family holding was accompanied by a colonisation programme which had two main aims. On the one hand the National Socialists continued from the Weimar Republic the so-called "Innere Kolonisation", a resettlement plan intended to counter the

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141 Haushofer, Die deutsche Landwirtschaft im technischen Zeitalter, p.264.

142 Richard Darré, Neuadel aus Blut und Boden (München: Lehmann, 1930), p.62.

depopulation of the countryside as a consequence of industrialisation and urbanisation. On the other, they emphasised the military potential of farming settlements as the vanguard of German expansion in the East, as Henry Turner points out in his study on fascism:

"Als Siedler im Osten würden diese Kolonisten wieder das einfache, reine Volksleben ihrer Vorfahren führen und wie einst wieder eine Schicht mutiger Freisaßen und ein unerschöpfliches Krieger-Reservoir für zukünftige Kämpfe bilden."<sup>143</sup>

The stability of agriculture was to be guaranteed by state protection from the fluctuations of the international market with the aim of creating a closed self-sufficient economy. Accordingly,

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- 143 Henry Turner, "Faschismus und Anti-Modernismus", in: Faschismus und Kapitalismus. Studien zum Verhältnis zwischen Nationalsozialismus und Wirtschaft (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1972), pp.166-167.

Werner Luis, in the conclusion of his dissertation, refers to the recurrence of this idea in the contemporary frontier novel: "Gemeinsam ist den grenz- und volksdeutschen Bauern das Ziel ihres Kampfes: Die Erhaltung des deutschen Bodens für das deutsche Volk. Der Bauer des deutschen Grenzlandes beharrt auf seinem Boden, bewahrt seine Art vor den Toren des Reiches aus der Kraft einer sehnsuchtsvollen Unruhe, die ihn sein Schicksal als ein vorläufiges auffassen läßt, in der Hoffnung, daß die widernatürlichen Grenzen, die seinen Boden, seinen Anteil am geschlossenen deutschen Volksboden vom Vaterlande trennen, fallen, und daß die Grenze des geschlossen - deutschen Volksbodens Grenze eines Reiches werde, dem auch er als Bauer auf seinem Boden angehört." (Luis, Das Bauerntum im grenz- und volksdeutschen Roman der Gegenwart, p.121.)

(The link between agrarian ideology and Hitler's aggressive foreign policy, founded on the claim of geopolitical necessity to acquire "Lebensraum" - "... to bring the soil into harmony with the population."<sup>143(1)</sup> - is clear from the appeal to the "... most sacred right on this earth ... to have earth to till with his own hands, and the most sacred sacrifice the blood that a man sheds for this earth."<sup>143(2)</sup>

- 143(1) Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, translated by Ralph Manheim [London: Hutchinson, 1969], p.593.

- 143(2) Ibid., p.607.

See also: Zimmermann, "Kampf um den Lebensraum.")

the entire agricultural sector was united in a cartel (the "Reichsnährstand") under centralised state control through a hierarchical structure based on the "Führer" principle, and marketing boards were created with the task of setting price controls and regulating supply and demand.

Behind this anti-liberal policy of autarchy lay political motives, namely preparations, at first latently and from 1936 onwards openly, for an approaching war.

Since, it was claimed, the German nation was descended from a race of settlers and farmers, the role of the individual farmer was of the greatest importance. Richard Darré, the National Socialist Minister of Agriculture, defined his function thus:

"Wir müssen uns vollkommen darüber klar sein, daß der Landwirt kein Unternehmer im landläufigen Sinne ist. Der Nährstand kann und soll sich nicht an dem Spiel der freien Preisbildung beteiligen; er darf nicht den damit verbundenen Gefahren ausgesetzt sein, weil seine Aufgabe für die Nation unerhört wichtig ist. Wir brauchen den Bauern als Blutsquell des deutschen Volkes und wir brauchen ihn als den Ernährer des deutschen Volkes. Darum kommt es auch nicht so sehr darauf an, daß der Bauer für seine Erzeugnisse einen möglichst hohen Preis abwirft, sondern es kommt darauf an, daß der Bauer durch ein deutsches Bauernrecht mit seinem Grund und Boden fest verwurzelt wird und für seine Arbeit einen gerechten Lohn d.h. auskömmliche, gerechte Preise erhält. Der Bauer muß seine Tätigkeit immer als eine Aufgabe an seinem Geschlecht und seinem Volk betrachten und niemals nur als eine rein wirtschaftliche Aufgabe, mit der man Geld verdienen kann."<sup>144</sup>

The moral obligation of the farmer to work on his land was to derive from the idea of duty to the "Volk". He was, then, as sire and feeder of the "Volk", in a special sense the servant of the state. The primacy of economic considerations in the relation between the farmer and his property was denounced as the self-interest typical of the capitalist competitive society.

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144 Richard Darré, Um Blut und Boden. Reden und Aufsätze (München: Franz Eher, 1940), p.359.

The success of this agrarian policy was minimal. In comparison with the years of the Weimar Republic the period of National Socialist rule brought a significant decline in production.<sup>145</sup> Already in 1936 shortages appeared in food supplies. And instead of curbing the flight from the land, the Hereditary Farm Law, the fundamental principle of which was the preference of the single male heir before the other progeny, was responsible for the migration of labour into industry.<sup>146</sup> In addition, the law's clause prohibiting credit prevented investment and thereby the expansion of production.

In practice the policy did not favour the small peasant who was to be the embodiment of the German race and economic foundation of the nation, but the capitalist landed nobility. The agrarian cartel and the protectionist tariff policy became instruments for the manipulation of the small farmer by an alliance of industrial and agrarian entrepreneurs.<sup>147</sup> Not only had the landed aristocracy lost little of its political and economic influence in the crises of the Weimar Republic through their contacts with industrial circles, the army, and Prussian officialdom, but when, in the late 1930's, the priority of re-armament led to a demand for increased food production and thus made a re-appraisal of the function of capitalist, rationalised agriculture necessary, economic motives took precedence over ideology and the generally more productive large landowners came to assume a key role in the economy.<sup>148</sup>

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145 Friedrich - Wilhelm Henning, Das industrialisierte Deutschland 1914 bis 1972 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1975), p.167.

146 From 1933 to 1939 the numbers employed on the land dropped 11%, a decrease of about 1.5 million (Onno Poppinga, Bauern und Politik [Frankfurt/M.: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1975], p.62). See also: Alfred Sohn - Rethel, Ökonomie und Klassenstruktur des deutschen Faschismus (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1973), p.102.

147 Sohn - Rethel, Ökonomie und Klassenstruktur des deutschen Faschismus, pp.99-103, passim.

148 Heinz Haushofer, Ideengeschichte der Agrarwirtschaft und Agrarpolitik im deutschen Sprachgebiet Vol.2 (München: Bayrischer Landwirtschaftsverlag, 1958), pp.276-277.

In fact, therefore, the implementation of these measures failed to improve the economic situation of the small and middle farmer, and brought about neither a significant change in the socio-economic structure on the land nor a revolution in agrarian property relationships. On the contrary, agricultural policy was shaped to the aims of industrial-capitalist expansion and military production.

The National Socialist myth of the farmer was seen from two diametrically opposed points of view in the literature of the time. On the one side, the prevailing "Blut und Boden" literature, of which Karl Heinrich Waggerl and Friedrich Giese were typical exponents, became an ideological instrument of the regime. On the other side anti-fascist authors such as Adam Scharrer and Anna Seghers emerged in political protest against National Socialism and made it their task to expose the contradictions between the myth and the true socio-economic position of the farmer in capitalist society.

## KARL HEINRICH WAGGERL

The mountain villages in the vicinity of Salzburg are the scene of the works of the Austrian author Karl Heinrich Waggerl (1897-1973). The son of a poor joiner, Waggerl's origins are, like Frenssen's, in the lower middle classes, and suggest that he, also, may have envisaged economic security and fulfilment in land-ownership.<sup>149</sup> The regional setting of his novels reflects his belief that the simple unassuming existence close to nature represented the fundamental human existence:

"Denn die Heimat ist das Bleibende, das Sichere, sie ist die Erbgnade für unser unseliges Geschlecht."<sup>150</sup>

All Waggerl's works extol the value of the humble ordered life and of the positive task in a restricted sphere.

Brot (1930), Waggerl's first and best-known novel, is modelled on Knut Hamsun's Segen der Erde.<sup>151</sup> It tells how, possessing nothing but the will to tame raw nature with his bare strength, and persevering in spite of despair, doubt and physical hardship, the pioneer Simon Röck makes a prosperous farm out of Eben, a desolate wilderness, and, together with a village girl Regina, sets up a family.

At the centre of the work is, as the title suggests, the idea that the foundation of life is bread, the product of the soil. The farming settlement is presented as the model of self-sufficiency. The simple life on Eben is existence in its essence for, we are told, the soil supplies all the needs of Simon and his family. When asked

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149 See: Rossbacher, Heimatkunstabewegung und Heimatroman, pp.81-84.

150 Karl Waggerl, Wagrainer Tagebuch (Leipzig: Insel, 1936), p.8.

151 The Norwegian Knut Hamsun (1859-1952) was a polemical critic of industrialisation and materialism. Segen der Erde (1917) was acclaimed a masterpiece and won him in 1920 the Nobel Prize for Literature.

what the land is worth, Simon replies:

"Wieviel Eben wert ist? Wir haben, was wir brauchen, mehr weiß ich nicht."<sup>152</sup>

Since the future of humanity is shown to lie in the tilling of the soil, the farmer is archetypal Man, as Waggenerl states explicitly in another novel:

"Der Mann, der zuerst da war und der zuletzt da sein wird, das ist der Bauer."<sup>153</sup>

The organic bonds between Simon and the land symbolise the farmer's closeness to the source of life:

"Er ist noch immer krumm und braun, ein wandelnder Klumpen Erde. Sein Rock ist siebenmal geflickt, und wenn ihn hungert, ißt er Brot aus seiner Tasche."<sup>154</sup>

And to Regina he seems to merge with the soil itself:

"Manchmal meint sie, er sei wohl einfach aus dem Boden gekrochen, aus der Erde von Eben, er ist so braun und auch so einfältig wie das Land in der Einöde."<sup>155</sup>

This vision of autarchy and fulfilment in the simple purposeful existence, which characterised the nineteenth-century agrarian novel and was epitomized in Peter Rosegger's reactionary agrarian utopias, is shown to be founded on the traditional middle-class notion of productive labour.

Simon has made the land his own through the work of his hands. With anti-capitalist sentiment - by now a familiar feature of the agrarian novel - Waggenerl sets creative toil against the power of money. Simon is approached by the authorities to purchase his property but Eben is not an object of speculation, a possession to be bought and sold at will:

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152 Karl Waggenerl, Brot (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1952), p.246.

153 Karl Waggenerl, Schweres Blut (Leipzig: Insel, 1931), p.201.

154 Waggenerl, Brot, p.293.

155 Ibid., p.77.



"... Er wollte Eben nicht kaufen, denn Eben war nicht, ehe er kam."<sup>156</sup>

The right of the farmer to his land cannot be dictated by commercial motives, for through labour it becomes an extension of his being.

The sanctity of personal property, production as a means of consumption rather than for profit, the moral value of achievement gained through personal effort and honest toil: these assumptions have typically been projected into the middle-class view of farming life.

A further feature of agrarian ideology is the notion of a social order founded on the farmer's ties to the soil. The permanence of farming life is translated into the social sphere to create an impression of social immutability and personal integrity. Simon is as indefatigable and self-reliant as the laws of nature itself:

"Ja, er allein ist fest, sein Leben ist unerschütterlich gefügt wie der Lauf des Jahres selbst. Wie ein Gestirn geht er seinen einzigen und einfachen Weg, aber darin ruht alles, was ist ..."<sup>157</sup>

Peter, his son, also has his roots in Eben:

"Peter ist gesund und stark, der Herr, die Wurzel und der Grund von allem."<sup>158</sup>

The suggestion of social stability through attachment to the eternal soil is reinforced by Waggerl's depiction of the indestructible domestic idyll:

"So leben diese drei Menschen in der Einöde, und sie leben zufrieden. Wenn die Felder abgeerntet sind, dann sorgt der Vater schon wieder für das nächste Jahr. Es gibt wohl zuweilen allerlei Unglück ... Aber das alles ist nicht mehr so

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<sup>156</sup> Waggerl, Brot, p.311.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p.246.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p.345.

schlimm, es fällt nur ein Steinchen aus der Mauer,  
das Ganze steht sicher und fest."<sup>159</sup>

The investment of everyday life with a higher purpose and symbolic value, the vision of fulfilment through unceasing work and self-denial in a non-competitive environment, contentment with one's lot and willing persistence, the suggestion of freedom from authority and change through the mystical unity of Man and nature<sup>160</sup>: these familiar motifs of the agrarian novel conform, in their conservative anti-capitalist tenor, most closely to petit-bourgeois assumptions and expectations, in so far as they lent themselves as ideological compensation for the insignificant individual caught in the mechanism of historical development: industrialisation, social polarisation and economic instability.

This appeal of the agrarian novel makes it appropriate that Waggerl combines the idealisation of farming life with a rejection of civilisation and progress which are shown to alienate modern Man from his origins. Farming has, in this context, not merely the value of a life-supporting occupation but, as in Rosegger's novels, suggests escape and refuge from the modern world. The countryside is the setting for spiritual recovery. Both for Simon, a former criminal, and Regina, who has been corrupted by the immorality of urban life, Eben represents a rejection of civilisation and rebirth in nature.

Like Rosegger's alpine village, Eben is a social model with which Waggerl contrasts a decadent modern world. Simon's antagonist is the miller, father of the neighbouring village, who embodies the superficial spirit of progress and acquisitive capitalism. A shrewd and enterprising opportunist, he is intent only on furthering his own prestige and wealth. For the villagers, whose fortunes follow

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<sup>159</sup> Waggerl, Brot, p.230.

<sup>160</sup> See: Rossbacher, Heimatkunstbewegung und Heimatroman, p.112.

his, comfort and ease become the chief goals. When mineral waters are discovered on Eben he buys the land and the village flourishes into a spa resort, but the prosperity does not last, for they have lost their ties to the land. The miller, in despair and bitterness at the change of his fortunes, frames Simon and finally commits suicide. Sebastian, his son, inherits the restlessness and aimlessness of his father and becomes a wanderer:

"... er flattert umher wie ein losgerissenes Blatt, unruhig und doch gleichmütig. Er hat keine Wurzeln in der Erde, das ist es vielleicht.... Von allem trennt er sich leicht, als ob es ihm gar nicht gehöre."<sup>161</sup>

As in the nineteenth-century agrarian novel, the myth of the soil here carries traditional connotations of personal integrity and morality, while rootlessness brings spiritual insecurity and degeneration.

Waggerl's works illustrate clearly how the image of the farmer's attachment to the soil conformed to the petit-bourgeois mentality. The small man's sentimental attachment to personal property as a sign of personal worth and social status is constructed into a philosophy of human salvation:

"Was immer geschehen mag, ein Mensch kann nicht gänzlich elend werden und zugrunde gehen, solange ihm noch ein Stück eigener Erde gehört."<sup>162</sup>

The clearest presentation of this idea is in the novel Schweres Blut (1931) whose title refers to the regeneration of humanity through the blood of the farmer and a return to the land. Here the archaic small holding, farmed not for profit but for the satisfaction of private needs, is posited as the natural form of production.

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<sup>161</sup> Waggerl, Brot, p.255.

<sup>162</sup> Karl Waggerl, Mütter (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1951), p.108.

The villagers have abandoned their small plots of land to work at a saw-mill which has become the hub of the community. Waggerl relates how the enterprise of the owner, Blas, has brought progress - capital and technology - into the village and destroyed the freedom of the peasant-farmers. The dependence on machines makes the individual's striving superfluous and alienates him from the product of his labour. The corruption of the modern age - technology and mechanisation -, which the author associates with the advent of industrial capitalism, brings the decline of the self-sufficient producer, separating him from the soil and thereby freeing him from the necessity of earning his living by the toil of his hands:

"Die Zeit ist vorbei, in der jeder Dorfbewohner seinen Streifen Ackerland hinter dem Hause hatte, eine Kuh oder ein paar Geißen im Stall. Mit den Jahren ist das Bauland rings um das Dorf abgebröckelt. Es war nicht mehr nötig, Bauer zu sein, sich um die geringe Frucht des Feldes zu mühen, seit die Säge stand. Um ihretwillen gab der Dorfbauer seine Freiheit auf, er wurde hörig. Er arbeitete nicht mehr, um Korn für sein eigenes Brot zu haben, das Geld schob sich in seine einfache und klare Rechnung."<sup>163</sup>

However, a devastating flood frustrates Blas' plans to expand the mill and the villagers return to their former existence. Their ties to the soil, which had been undermined by the inroads of civilisation, are restored, appropriately, by the forces of nature.

Waggerl's idyllic vision of farming life is linked with biological notions of blood and soil and of the racial superiority of the farmer. Attachment to the soil is ascribed biological value:

"Der Bauer ist ewig wie die Erde selbst, denn er lebt durch sein Geschlecht ... nichts bleibt von ihm zurück als sein Name und sein schweres Blut."<sup>164</sup>

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163 Waggerl, Schweres Blut, p.169.

164 Ibid., pp.18-19..

Thus Waggerl links the agrarian idyll with the racial myth of the farmer. Shaped not by socio-economic processes but by heredity and environment, the farmer is entrusted with an important function: the creation of a new lineage. The process of the inheritance of property marks a recognition and affirmation of his links with the soil:

"Es gibt da keinen Kampf, keinen Streit. Ein alter Baum stirbt ab, seine Nadeln fallen, sein Laub, er läßt Licht durch und zur guten Zeit hat er Samen ausgeworfen, der jetzt heranwächst und groß wird. Ein gleicher Baum, fast an derselben Stelle ..."<sup>165</sup>

Waggerl's philosophy reveals, as we have seen, a close affinity to nineteenth-century provincialism with its avoidance of social problems, disregard for historical development, and associations of resignation and withdrawal from the modern age into a substitute world of order and harmony. The author's reactionary anti-civilisatory polemic, the glorification of the peasant holding which, to embittered sections of the traditional middle classes in an age of rapidly changing social configurations, readily presented itself as the symbol of economic security and social status, the high evaluation of the qualities of physical toil and willing endurance in contrast to the degeneration of modern society: these motifs are a legacy from the "Heimatkunst" movement with its opposition to an increasingly industrial and urban Germany.

What distinguishes Waggerl's works, however, is the extension of the definition of the farmer with biological ingredients which created that combination of agrarian ideology and racial theory which makes conceivable the appeal of National Socialist propaganda to the traditional middle-class consciousness.

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<sup>165</sup> Waggerl, Brot, p.367.

Although it would be unjust to brand him as a National Socialist author, it is possible to see Waggerl's agrarian mysticism as an - albeit unintentional - anticipation of the philosophy underlying the regime's programme. Economic autarchy based on predominantly agrarian production, the peasant-farmer as the sire of a new humanity: these were ideals into which reactionary groups could project their disillusionment with the economic and social bankruptcy of the industrial-capitalist state, and conformed to the anti-capitalist, anti-liberal bias of National Socialist propaganda. Officially, the task of the farmer was not personal gain but the communal obligation to feed the "Volk" and furnish a blood source for the nation. In the words of the Minister of Agriculture Darré:

"Denn vom deutschen Standpunkte aus hat der Boden zwei Aufgaben: er soll die auf ihm siedelnden Geschlechter erhalten und die Ernährung des Gesamtvolkes sichern; er soll mithin eine blutsverantwortliche und eine volkswirtschaftliche Aufgabe erfüllen."<sup>166</sup>

For Waggerl, as for National Socialist theorists, it was the inherited family, peasant holding, the "Erbhof", as a social structure and economic form, it was claimed, incompatible with profit-orientated capitalist production, free from the fluctuations of competition and ensuring blood continuity in management, which was destined to fulfil these functions.

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<sup>166</sup> Darré, Neuadel aus Blut und Boden, p.97.

## FRIEDRICH GRIESE

While Waggener projects petit-bourgeois aspirations and biological notions into the agrarian idyll, the explicit racial emphasis in all Griese's works gives them a more direct and obvious political relevance which was noted by the National Socialist literary critic Hellmuth Langenbucher who commented:

"Grieses Kunst ist im besten Sinne 'politische Kunst' - Politik begriffen ganz einfach als Dienst am Volk."167

Griese substitutes collective racial consciousness for petit-bourgeois individualism as a social ideal and depicts the historical significance of the farmer as a heroic racial personality. Duty to the "Volk" is symbolised by the farmer's ties to the native soil. His works have been regarded with justification as models of "Blut und Boden" literature:

"Grieses Dichtung ist im besten Sinne, fern aller Phrase und Konjunktur Dichtung aus 'Blut und Boden' ... Es ist der Mythos des 'Neuen Menschen', den Griese in allen seinen Werken formt, des Menschen, von dem aller Flitter der Zivilisation abgeglitten ist."168

Griese (1890-1975) became in 1934 a member under National Socialism of the "Deutsche Akademie der Dichtung" and received several honours.

Set in Mecklenburg Griese's works, a mixture of saga and reality, are concerned with the unity of Man, landscape and race. He held the fate of the farmer to be the key to Germany's future:

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167 Hellmuth Langenbucher, "Dichter im Dritten Reich - Friedrich Griese." Neues Volk, May 1936, p.27, in: Joseph Wulf, Literatur und Dichtung im Dritten Reich. Eine Dokumentation (Gütersloh: Sigbert Mohn, 1963), p.308.

168 Loc cit.

"... ist für den bäuerlichen Menschen oberstes Gesetz: seine Art rein zu halten, sich seinem Geschlecht gegenüber verantwortlich zu fühlen. Und da ich, neben allem anderen, diese Wahrheit in meinen Büchern immer wieder festgehalten zu haben glaube, so möchte ich damit mein Teil zur Lösung einer der ernsthaftesten Volksfragen beigetragen haben."<sup>169</sup>

of his novels Winter (1927), the symbolic representation of the decline and regeneration of the race, is perhaps the clearest profession of this personal creed.

Winter relates how a series of natural disasters brings about the decline of the isolated farming settlement known as the "Lange Reihe". Although moral degeneration, the result of separation from the mother-soil, has sealed the doom of the village, two of their number, Jona and Grita, guided by their instincts, are able to escape and colonise fresh land to renew the race.

Jona's origins point to his destiny as founder of the new "Volksgemeinschaft."

In him runs the creative blood of his parents. Like his father, Petrusch, he is a friend to all creatures and possesses insight into the mysterious forces of the cosmos. To indicate his origins Petrusch takes clumps of earth in his hands, and Jona, also, is one with the soil and so comprehends its laws:

"Und für sich hin sagte er dann wohl, daß im Grunde alles aus der Erde komme, Heil und Unheil, auch das, was scheinbar aus der Höhe falle. Und da der Mensch nicht anders sei als die Erde, zeige sich alles in seinem Blute an; und er müsse nur darauf achten."<sup>170</sup>

References to his primeval origins show that he is chosen to fulfil a special role in the community as an archetypal figure, the

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169 Friedrich Griesse, Mein Leben. Von der Kraft der Landschaft. (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt, 1934), p.65.

170 Friedrich Griesse, Winter (Berlin: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1938), pp.57-58.



new individual free from the refinements of civilisation. The description of his parents as "... geschmeidig und stark an Gliedern wie Tiere der Vorzeit und unbekümmert wie sie",<sup>171</sup> finds its parallel in the attribution of Jona with superhuman qualities: "... ungefüge an Körper und Geist."<sup>172</sup>

From his mother he has the blood of the "Lange Reihe" yet possesses a strength and creativity which sets him above the villagers. She is described as "... die Mutter eines ganzen Volkes...",<sup>173</sup> and in her issue, Jona, lies the future of the lineage:

"... er stand wie ein junger Baum unter kranken  
Stämmen und niedergebrochenem Astwerk."<sup>174</sup>

By virtue of this biological predestination Jona is thus one of the "Lange Reihe" yet at the same time an outsider. Moreover, a mystical perception of the cosmos makes him superior to the villagers who have become separated from the soil. He alone is able to interpret signs which augur disorder in nature: the unaccountable appearance of strange celestial constellations and the untimely preparations of creatures for an early winter.

The villagers' alienation from the soil manifests itself in moral decline and egoism. Not only are sexual passions no longer curbed by communal custom and tradition but the villagers fail to recognise fundamental biological imperatives. In contravention of the custom that the family property can only be inherited, Thord, an outsider with no blood-bond with the soil, is allowed to force his way into the community by purchasing a farm. This suggestion of unrestrained self-seeking, associated typically with the power

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171 Friedrich Griese, Winter, p.29.

172 Ibid., p.83.

173 Ibid., p.41.

174 Ibid., p.83.

of money as against the force of tradition, is reinforced by the brutality of the alien. Since the "Lange Reihe" will accept him only if he marries a village girl, he attacks and seduces Grita, who, in her shame, feels obliged to meet his wishes. As Löns had done in Der Wehrwolf, Griese attributes the racial alien with moral depravity. The superiority of the "Volksgemeinschaft", defended ultimately by the destruction of the foreigner, is legitimized here, as there, by Darwinist arguments:

"Er ist blutfremd und will sich nicht in den Gang der Höfe fügen. Aber sie sind eine ganze Reihe; und er ist einer. Also sind sie stärker als er."<sup>175</sup>

The cause of decline lies, we are told, in the fact that the villagers have put their own interests ahead of those of the community. Each is obsessed with his own affairs:

"Jedermann hatte seine heimliche Kammer, die niemand außer ihm betreten durfte, oder es war mit seinem Ansehen vorbei."<sup>176</sup>

Fear and passivity follow in the wake of this individualism and lame their purpose:

"Alt waren sie, waren nie aus dem ruhigen Gang zwischen Hofplatz, Feld und Wald herausgekommen."<sup>177</sup>

"... ihr Geist war durch diese Monate des Unheils ermattet, daß er an eine Tat sich nicht mehr heranwagte." <sup>178</sup>

The dislocation of the seasons - an exceptionally arid summer is followed by a seemingly endless winter - mirrors their disregard for the laws of blood and soil.

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<sup>175</sup> Griese, Winter, p.35.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p.82.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p.306.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p.320.

In contrast to the indifference and egoism of the villagers, Jona and Grita are shown to be motivated by a consciousness of communal responsibility. Grita's moral principles, illustrated by her decision to marry Thord as duty demands, reveal a willingness to act for others:

"... dieses Handeln und Vorausdenken für andere, dieses Zurücksetzen dessen, was man selber gerne möchte, um ein Vorbild zu sein..."<sup>179</sup>

Jona, similarly, must risk his life for the community. His task is to destroy the degenerate alien Thord, the incarnation of the depravity of foreign blood, and thereby restore the order and exclusiveness of the organic "Volksgemeinschaft."

In the village the absence of children is further evidence that the blood has become old and uncreative. Grita, however, as befits her biological role<sup>180</sup>, is soon bearing the sire of a new line. While the villagers perish, Jona and Grita, conscious that they are carrying the future of the race with them, follow the call of the soil and set out towards fertile farmland on which to establish the new blood. The decline of the village appears thus as only part of a cyclic, organic process of growth and decline, designed to illustrate the eternal truth that fresh reserves of regeneration are always present to ensure the continuation of the race:

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179 Griese, Winter, p.100.

180 Worthy of note here is the particular significance under National Socialism attached to the mother as bearer of Germany's future sons.

"Und auch in früheren Zeiten hatte es Völker oder Gemeinden oder Geschlechter gegeben, denen es ergangen war, wie es den Höfen erging. Sie waren einmal alt geworden, trübe, zehrten vom letzten Tropfen, versiegten mit ihm. Dafür war dann ein anderes Volk, ein neues Geschlecht in den Tag getreten und hatte die Dinge weitergeführt.

Aber auch das wußte er, daß niemals eine Gemeinde, ein Volk bis auf den letzten Mann unterging. Ein Mensch blieb, vielleicht zwei. In ihnen trieb der alte Stamm noch ein letztes Reis, gab Blüte und Frucht und zeigte, wie stark er einmal gewesen war."<sup>181</sup>

Winter exemplifies the pattern typical of Griesse's works: decline through transgression against communal tradition, the infiltration of foreign blood and the destruction of collective consciousness through narrow individualism, and finally the restoration of order through the return of farming stock to the eternal mother-earth.

The two novels Der ewige Acker (1930) and Das letzte Gesicht (1934) are concrete representations of this process. Set in the years from 1914 to 1918 and 1918 to 1922 respectively they follow the dissolution of order and tradition in the village of Reth through war, the social upheaval, and its effects.

The new age is characterised by corruption and disorder. Crime, exploitation and immorality flourish: the shoemaker's apprentice Konrad rises to prosperity through the black market while the aged are abandoned to poverty, women and pensioners are compelled to undertake farm labour and, contrary to tradition, the cottagers, who can claim no blood-bond with the soil, outnumber the farmers. To emphasise the community's alienation from its origins Griesse embodies the new thinking in the person of the corrupt milker, an outsider from the city, and a cottager, who take over the

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<sup>181</sup> Griesse, Winter, p.82.

administration and bring electricity, the symbol of the modern age, into the village.

Once more, however, the race is shown to perpetuate itself from the regenerative powers of the soil. Progress and prosperity are transitory, for the earth remains unaffected by the fates of men. Just as his ancestor had founded the community after the chaos of the Thirty Years' War, so Fanna, the embodiment of the village, is, like his counterpart Jona in Winter, destined to restore the mystical ties between the "Volksgemeinschaft" and the native soil:

"Er war das Dorf. Mochten die Menschen in Reth und die Menschen in allen Dörfern noch einmal vom Weg gehen und Händlern und Schwindlern in die Hände fallen, sie waren nicht das Dorf, und ob sie noch zu ihm zurückfanden, war gleichgültig. Die Erde rechnete nicht nur mit einem einzigen Alter, so lange sie war, waren die Dörfer, und wenn dieses Geschlecht nicht mehr die Kraft und den Willen und die Genügsamkeit hatte, zurückzufinden, würden andere geboren werden, die wußten wieder, was nötig war."<sup>182</sup>

The farmer again appears in the role of the colonist who founds or re-establishes the race on the eternal German soil.

The ideology of "Blut und Boden" rests on an ahistorical view of social development. Griese frames the qualities of the "Volk" within the unchanging forces of nature to create an image of racial continuity and freedom from historical determination. The sovereignty of nature<sup>183</sup> suggests, on the one hand, the absence of social antagonisms, on the other dependence on heredity and

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182 Friedrich Griese, Das letzte Gesicht (München: Langen und Müller, 1942), p.315.

183 Anneliese Gebhard makes this observation in her study:

"Das Neue, das die zeitgenössische deutsche Bauerndichtung mit ihrer Landschaftsschau erobert hat, liegt in der Anerkennung der Natur als selbständiger, vom Menschen im Grunde unbeeinflussbarer Macht."  
(Anneliese Gebhard, Der deutsche Bauernroman seit 1900 [Diss. Danzig, 1935], p.26.)

environment. Thus, as we have seen, Griesse, in Das letzte Gesicht, sets attachment to the native soil against progress and civilisation, and in Winter the chaos of the elements recalls the villagers to their true origins. Griesse's description of the village reinforces the appearance of immutability. In the "Lange Reihe", a name which itself suggests continuity, time has stood still:

"Ringsum ist die Welt inzwischen tausend Jahre weitergekommen; die Höfe aber ruhen wohlbehütet im Schutze ihres eigenen Schattens."<sup>184</sup>

The exclusion of the outside world is further suggested by the passing of the generations:

"Sie leben und arbeiten hier, wie schon die Vorväter gelebt und gearbeitet haben."<sup>185</sup>

As well as the exclusion of social background, the anonymity of the hero and his mystical bondage to the primordial forces of blood and soil are designed to demonstrate the priority of racial identity over social position. As we have observed, the author constructs his characters with a view to displaying racial values and biological principles. The titles of his novels - "Die Weißköpfe", "Winter", "Der ewige Acker" - indicate this. It is either nature or the "Volk" which dominates the action, not the individual. Griesse's heroes are, as a result, abstract marionette-like figures lacking individual complexity, their task not personal emancipation or fulfilment but subordination to the collective interests of the "Volk".

The biological myth of the farmer popularised by authors such as Waggenerl and Griesse not only found direct political expression in the regime's agrarian programme but had more general

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<sup>184</sup> Griesse, Winter, p.34.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p.35.

relevance. Apart from the obvious affinity between the racial bias of "Blut und Boden" ideology and the rabid anti-semitism of National Socialism, the racial myth of the soil was eminently applicable to Hitler's war aims. The myth of the mystical unity between the "Volk" and the native soil could easily be interpreted as an argument for the right to dispute and conquer living-space judged essential to accommodate a growing population.

Perhaps of greater consequence for the reader was the mentality which it was designed to produce, namely willing sacrifice for the greater good of an unspecified "Volk". Translated into terms of political reality this meant the slavish obedience of the citizen to dictatorship, for after 1933 service to the fictional "Volksgemeinschaft" became indistinguishable from unquestioning loyalty to the National Socialist state as the self-acclaimed articulation of the "Volkswille". In this context, by contributing to the organisation of the subject for the fascist cause, the agrarian novel lent itself to the National Socialists as a ready-made instrument of indoctrination to legitimize their political authority.

On the one hand the racial transformation of agrarian ideology was a logical development from the nationalist sentiment and biological notions of blood and soil in the "völkisch" novels of Frenssen, Burte and Löns. On the other, the construction of a racial morality in the image of traditional middle-class idealism (the exclusion of social antagonisms, economic autarchy, achievement and status through selfless labour and endurance) demonstrated clearly the crisis of conservatism in the modern age. The racial farming myth bore little relation to the reality of the twentieth-

century capitalist state, even less to the reality of Hitler's Germany founded as it was on industrial expansion (especially the indispensability of heavy industry and large capital for armament production), the uninterrupted support of capitalist principles of production, and the rigid political oppression of totalitarianism.

The ideological function of the National Socialist agrarian novel can be summarised then as: to support the National Socialist claim of transforming industrial, materialist, class society into a national "Volksgemeinschaft" on an agrarian basis and standing above social divisions,<sup>186</sup> and to instil in the reader the civic virtues of subordination and selfless patriotism.

While "Blut und Boden" authors - whether intentionally or not - gave ideological support to the cause of German fascism, a small group of anti-fascist authors such as Adam Scharrer and Anna Seghers published protest literature exposing and condemning the inhumanity of National Socialist politics. In opposition to the myth of racial regeneration through the blood of the eternal German farmer, socialist authors presented a Marxist explanation of historical development as a dynamic process of class struggle. Committed to the cause of the victims of the advanced capitalism which they regarded as the true nature of fascism, and subscribing to a progressive dialectical theory of social change, they depicted life on the land, not with a "völkisch", national-racial

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186 Zimmermann reaches similar conclusions in his analysis: "So lassen sich zwei Hauptfunktionen der faschistischen Literatur ausmachen: Einmal sollte sie zur Verschleierung des Widerspruchs von antikapitalistischem Programm und prokapitalistischer Praxis der NSDAP beitragen, zum anderen hatte sie die ungebrochene Präsenz der Klassengegensätze zu verdecken und die Illusion der harmonisierten Volksgemeinschaft zu fördern." (Zimmermann, Der Bauernroman, p.153.)



bias, but under the conditions of class antagonism in the context of modern industrial society, with a view to the ultimate victory of the exploited proletariat.

ADAM SCHARRER AND THE TRANSFORMATION  
OF THE AGRARIAN NOVEL

The socialist novel dealing with life on the land is characterised not by a bourgeois narrative perspective but by that of the proletariat. Accordingly, the new type of hero is no longer the independent farmer whose inconspicuous, industrious existence, bound to the soil by the ties of heredity, loyalty and tradition, was contrasted with the spirit of self-seeking capitalism, but the landless rural labourer, the victim of class exploitation and oppression in capitalist society.<sup>187</sup> One of the first authors to write from this standpoint was Franz Rehbein (1867-1909) who, after a serious accident put an end to his life on the land, became active in the workers' movement as a correspondent for various Social-Democratic journals and published in 1911 an autobiographical account of his life as a rural labourer in the years between 1867 and 1895.

In this work, Das Leben eines Landarbeiters, Rehbein shows how, on the estates of North East Germany where the class polarisation of the rural population was most advanced, the capitalisation of agriculture proceeded at the cost of an oppressed proletariat. The worker is deprived of intellectual stimulus, chained to the monotony of hard physical labour, defenceless against the whims of his superiors, and forced into submission by rigid contracts recalling the bondage of the feudal era. The

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187 See: Gudrun Kühn, Welt und Gestalt des Bauern in der deutschsprachigen Literatur. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Epik seit dem 18. Jahrhundert (Diss. [Masch.] Leipzig, 1970), p.352 ff.

wretched accommodation of the farm-labourer, for example, illustrates his status in the eyes of the typical employer:

"Das Gesinde wird eben nur als eine Art lebendiger Mittelstufe zwischen Vieh und Herrschaft angesehen und demgemäß auch 'gehalten'. Diese Auffassung hat sich noch bis heute-wenn auch in etwas modernisierter Form - aus den Zeiten der Leibeigenschaft in die Gegenwart herübergeschleppt. Von einer auch nur annähernd menschlichen Gleichwertung des Gesindes mit der Herrschaft oder deren Stellvertretung ist auch heute noch nirgends die Rede. Selbst die humanste Grundbesitzer machen hiervon keine Ausnahme."188

Although he conceals neither the labourer's devotion to farm work nor the good will of individual employers, Rehbein explains why the fundamentally primitive living and working conditions of the rural proletariat led them necessarily into the ranks of the Social Democrats. In a discussion with the editor of his work, Paul Göhre, Rehbein remarks that not class consciousness but personal experience made his comrades instinctively set their own interests collectively in opposition to those of their employers and put their hopes in political and social change through the working-class movement:

"Nicht klare Erkenntnis-denn dazu mangelte es ihnen an Aufklärung-wohl aber ihr natürlicher Arbeiterinstinkt brachte sie unbewußt der Sozialdemokratie nahe. Was in der Welt sollten sie schließlich auch anders werden, als Sozialdemokraten?"189

Here, for the first time, political commitment is presented positively as the spontaneous reaction to material wretchedness. A comparison with the bourgeois presentation of the labourer illustrates the shift in perspective.

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188 Franz Rehbein, Das Leben eines Landarbeiters (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1973), p.108.

189 Ibid., p.292 (Prologue: "Wie ich Sozialdemokrat wurde").

Amidst the emancipatory, egalitarian movements of radical change and political reform Gotthelf had formulated a conservative, non-political solution to the social problem: Christian guidance and welfare, honest toil, and moral rectitude. Half a century later the enlightened conservative Polenz recognised the social evil of an oppressed and exploited proletariat but rejected any political solution to the social problem which would pose a threat to existing property relationships, the foundation of which was the hegemony of the aristocratic landowning class. Instead, like Gotthelf, he saw the answer in the capacity of a benevolent patriarchal nobility for reform and welfare, and in the conservative force of property ownership to neutralise the revolutionary potential of the proletariat and bind them to the state. Bourgeois concern for the plight of the worker, then, was restricted to emotional involvement: sympathy, and moral indignation at the unscrupulousness of the individual capitalist. It failed to extend to political commitment.

Rehbein, on the other hand, for whom the mechanism of rural social relationships excludes the possibility of material improvement or of social advancement within the existing system, puts his hopes in a progressive ideology which envisaged the future in the hands of a powerful, politically active proletariat. The salvation of the worker is seen not in property, with its associations of personal worth and individuality, but in revolutionary collectivism:

"Der allgemeine Kulturstand drängt aber nach Fortschritt und nicht nach Rückschritt; und von

ihm getragen wird auch die mächtige aufwärtsstrebende Arbeiterbewegung Mittel und Wege finden, um das millionenstarke Heer der deutschen Landarbeiter aus einem fast noch mittelalterlichen Abhängigkeitsverhältnis einer besseren, menschenwürdigeren Zukunft entgegenzuführen."<sup>190</sup>

In its political tenor Das Leben eines Landarbeiters is a forerunner of the novels of Adam Scharrer (1889-1948), one of the foremost anti-fascist authors who put their works in the service of the socialist cause during the late Weimar Republic and National Socialist regime.

Adam Scharrer collected experiences of the class struggle within the capitalist system in his home village and during years of unemployment and isolation. His own aimless protests as a social outcast in his youth<sup>191</sup> form the personal background to the thematic pattern of his works:<sup>192</sup> the process by which the proletarian hero overcomes his spontaneous anarchical rebelliousness to gain class awareness and commit himself to the united revolutionary struggle of the urban and rural workers against exploitation. Scharrer's political creed is marked by a belief in the primacy of collective before individual interests in the class struggle of the proletariat. Like Rehbein he gave literary expression to his convictions in political journalism, and was a prominent member of the KAP (Kommunistische Arbeiter Partei), a

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190 Rehbein, Das Leben eines Landarbeiters, p.287 (Conclusion).

191 See: Walter Fähnders and Martin Rector, Linksradikalismus und Literatur, Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der sozialistischen Literatur in der Weimarer Republic, (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1974), Vol.2, 1924-32, p.249ff.

192 The significance of the biographical background of personal protest and social isolation common to socialist authors writing during the Weimar Republic is discussed by Alfred Klein in the chapter "Vom Rebellen zum Revolutionär" in: A.K., Im Auftrag ihrer Klasse. Weg und Leistung der deutschen Arbeiterschriststeller 1918-1933 (Berlin [DDR]: Aufbau, 1972), p.220 ff.

radical left-wing organisation.

Three of Scharrer's works deal with conditions on the land: Maulwürfe (1933), Der Hirt von Rauweiler (1942), and Dorfgeschichten einmal anders (1948). While Maulwürfe is the most powerful of the three in its message, the works that follow contain the same bitter social criticism and outspoken political protest.

Der Hirt von Rauweiler, published in Soviet exile, is strongly autobiographical and exposes the socio-economic structure of a South German village at the end of the nineteenth century. The poor herdsman Franz Leikant comes to realise that his dream of a farm of his own is an illusion for, like the other oppressed villagers, he is at the mercy of a powerful, land and money-hungry clique within the communal administration. He gradually arrives at this conclusion as he becomes aware that others share his fate:

"Wir gehören zu denen, die festgenagelt sind ...  
festgenagelt auf Gnade und Barmherzigkeit."<sup>193</sup>

The process of political education continues as the hero learns to suppress his private concerns and, together with the active socialist Springer, protests against corruption and oppression. The work concludes optimistically with the exposure of intrigues and the marked growth of support for the socialists in parliamentary elections.

Dorfgeschichten einmal anders, a collection of short stories, is, as the title suggests, a conscious attempt to reveal the brutal, inhuman implications of the "Blut und Boden" ideology for the inhabitants of a village under the Third Reich.

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193 Adam Scharrer, Der Hirt von Rauweiler (Berlin [DDR]: Aufbau, 1949), p.150.

In Maulwürfe, published after Scharrer had emigrated to Prague, the events in the Franconian village of Steinernlaibach reflect, in the form of a chronicle, the political, economic, and social situation on the land from the First World War until the beginning of the Third Reich. The hero Georg Brendl, a poor farmer, is driven to active political protest against injustice by the class struggles within his village.

In contrast with the traditional agrarian novel which concentrated on individual striving, personal achievement, and moral character formation, Scharrer is here, as in Der Hirt von Rauhweiler, intent on portraying the political development of the hero as a member of his class. The learning process of the central character Georg Brendl illustrates how the socialist author replaces individualist petit-bourgeois principles of heroic isolation, withdrawal and endurance, by collective proletarian ideals of class solidarity, political commitment, and protest.

The choice of the hero as narrator means that the narrative is coloured throughout by a personal perspective. This device adds immediacy to the account of his cheerless childhood and youth, thereby creating a convincing background for his later development. However, it is not a central character but the changing fortunes of the villagers which Scharrer brings to the fore. By making the hero gradually retire from the centre of the action, the author, as Gudrun Kühn points out,<sup>194</sup> makes visible the development

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194 Kühn, Welt und Gestalt des Bauern in der deutschsprachigen Literatur, p.381.

of class consciousness in the narrator. Personal and class perspectives are shown to merge. His initial preoccupation with immediate personal and familial problems makes way for a wider commitment to the cause of the rural proletariat, marked first by his defence of a persecuted farmer, and then by his deeper involvement in the socialist union, the "Bund der Frankenbauern." The hero's own development is in this way related to events in the village and receives symbolic value as the fate of his class.

The symbolic title "Maulwürfe" is central to the message of the work. In a negative sense it refers to the small farmer's obsessive and irrational attachment to the soil which makes him the prey of capitalist landowners:

"Wie a Maulwurf wühlt der kla Bauer si ei in sei Fleckl Erdbudn, und wenn er a Menschnalter gschindert hat, hat er nix. Jede hundert Mark Schuldn sind a Wurm von Großkapital, der's letzt Fleckl wegfrißt, bis uns nix mehr ghört, und nacha kummt alles zu den großn Haufn, der scho zsammgstuhln is in viel hundert Jahr."<sup>195</sup>

While the bourgeois author set up the independent farmer as an enduring ethical model, the socialist Scharrer, espousing the Marxist interpretation of historical development, predicts his ruin in the path of advancing capitalism. The peasant's individualist petit-bourgeois mentality, Scharrer has one character argue, serves only to perpetuate the unjust existing property relationships for, intent on saving his property and preventing his own decline into the proletariat, the small producer's thinking and behaviour make him naturally hostile to collective association:

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<sup>195</sup> Adam Scharrer, Maulwürfe. Ein deutscher Bauernroman (Berlin [DDR]: Aufbau, 1963), p.259.



"Die Bauern mirkn, daß's net besser wird, wenn jeder schindert, bis er vreckt und net nau sein Kameradn hischaut, den sie himachn." <sup>196</sup>

Property consciousness thus represents a psychological barrier to proletarian class solidarity and to the workings of economic development.

The causal relationship between the economic predicament of the small producer in competitive capitalist society and his counter-revolutionary political sympathies is illustrated by the career of two villagers. The beliefs of the rabid anti-communist, and later fervent National Socialist forester Schuldikum are traced to his youth when he witnessed the ruin of his parents' farm through rising costs and a lack of credit, and the turner Engerling, unable to find markets for his products, lays the blame at the feet of the socialists and becomes a supporter of the Third Reich. The socio-economic background of these characters provides the key to their later political beliefs, showing how the small producer's fear for his petty property, and bitterness at the uninterrupted concentration of capital and economic instability in the 1920's were able to be canalised into resentment of an impotent party system of government, hostility to a collectivist socialist programme, and support for the anti-capitalist proclamations of the National Socialists.

Scharrer's depiction of his characters as products of their socio-economic environment exposes the falsity of the bourgeois regard for private values to the exclusion of social determination.

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<sup>196</sup> Scharrer, Maulwürfe, p.259.

The virtues of toil, thrift, and self-abnegation are shown to be meaningless in a system which subjugates the worker to a marginal existence. For the landless villagers of Steinernlaibach there is no prospect of becoming landowners themselves, and the stability of the small farmers is in perpetual jeopardy. The post-war inflation freed the small farmer from debt but the pressure of taxation and price increases for consumer goods, the results of a protectionist agricultural policy, compelled them to take up fresh mortgages on their properties. The land of one farmer, Bertl, is confiscated, his children sent to an orphanage, and his wife loses her reason. One farmer sets fire to his own house in the desperate hope of obtaining insurance compensation, while another attempts without success to pay his debts by selling stock and dismissing labour.

Economic pressures and the daily struggle for existence of the characters in Scharrer's novel destroy the National Socialist myth of the idyllic family plot. The author shows how physical hardship, poverty and unemployment breed jealousy and avarice, and disrupt family bonds.<sup>197</sup> Georg Brendl's father-in-law, the miserly master-joiner Schwelm, who has been driven out of competition by the large-scale production of the factory-owner Helmut Hanfstengel, refuses to surrender his farm for fear of being turned out of his home and finally hangs himself. And a soldier, on returning from the war to find his father's - and now rightfully his - farm in the possession of his brother-in-law,

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197 Anna Seghers paints an even more depressing picture of human misery in Der Kopflohn (1933) where she describes the decline of the North German peasantry into indebtedness and abject poverty, together with its social consequences: the brutality, egoism and greed of a ruthless struggle for survival.

kills him out of desperation.

The chronicle form of the novel has the function of revealing the class foundation on which the Weimar Republic became the Third Reich and of exposing the role played by the exploiting classes in the rise of National Socialism. Scharrer achieves this purpose by establishing, through the accumulation of factual detail, a relationship between fascist agrarian policy and bourgeois ideology.

Central features of the National Socialist agrarian programme - protectionism, autarchy, and the suspension of credit -, implemented, it was announced officially, to assist the small producer, are shown to have the opposite effect of increasing his indebtedness:

"Die Arbeitsbauern zahlen die Erhöhung der Preise für ihre wenigen Überschussprodukte durch die gestiegenen Preise für Zucker, Heringe, Salz, Gries und Graupen, Stiefel und Kleidung doppelt zurück. Die Schulden sind geblieben. Der Vollstreckungsschutz ist wie ein Offenbarungskleid. "198

The true purpose of these measures, Scharrer argues, is related to the interests of class struggle, namely to widen the gap between the bourgeoisie and the workers, as it reads in a socialist propaganda pamphlet:

"Für die Reichen immer neue Liebesgaben  
für die Armen immer neue Steuern, Gerichtsvollzieher,  
zuletzt den Bettelstecken.

Schiffsladungen mit Weizen und Kaffee werden verbrannt oder ins Meer geschüttet, um - die Hungersnot zu überwinden. Baumwollernten werden vernichtet - und unsere Kinder haben kein Hemd. "199

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198 Scharrer, Maulwürfe, p.336.

199 Ibid., p.264.

Anti-urban propaganda - in the bourgeois novel the expression of middle-class escapism - represents another tactic to distract the exploited classes from the true causes of their oppression, and to safeguard the position of the dominant classes by maintaining the psychological distance between the rural population and the organised industrial proletariat. Scharrer refutes the bourgeois view of the peasantry as an independent social grouping with the Marxist class theory of the distribution of power and property. The "Grüne Front", formed in response to the agrarian crisis of the Depression, which purported to represent specifically agrarian interests, proves to be the product of an alliance of both industrial and agrarian monopolists, as one farmer comments:

"Die Herren von Ar und Halm und die von Eisen und Stahl, die werfn si doch gegenseiti die Bäll zu."<sup>200</sup>

The politics of the ruling classes, Scharrer shows, especially the stricter tariffs on imported agricultural products, not only serve to consolidate existing property relationships but are designed to divide the working classes between city and land. The socialist correspondent Dornbusch is expressing the view of the author when he points out to the villagers that the class alliance between the rural and urban proletariat against the bourgeoisie must transcend cultural barriers, since both the agricultural wage-labourer and the industrial worker are excluded from ownership of the means of production:

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<sup>200</sup> Scharrer, Maulwürfe, p.127.

"Die Arbeiter in den Fabriken sind ja eure eignen  
Söhne und Töchter, die ihr fortschicken müßt,  
weil ihr kein Land habt."<sup>201</sup>

This alliance is symbolised by the friendship between the poor farmer Georg Brendl and the factory-worker Ignatz Wipping.

The social configuration of National Socialism is illustrated by the unbroken domination of a capitalist clique under the fascist regime. The concentration of land in the hands of the entrepreneurs and speculators, the Kronenwirt, the Hanfstengel brothers and the Junker Baron von Eich, continues uninterrupted, and political and economic conditions enable them, with the support or at least connivance of the state institutions - the police, the judiciary and the Church,- to extend their influence and consolidate their class position. Scharrer in this way connects political power and the economic superiority of the bourgeoisie based on property. Anti-semitic and anti-communist agitation, nationalist appeals and attacks on party government represent endeavours to disguise with ideology the fact that property relationships have remained unchanged.

The political conflict between the socialists and fascists in the village is thus shown to be merely another form of class antagonism between the landowners and the proletariat. The necessity of revolutionary change is emphasised by the hardening of the class struggle under National Socialism. The capitalist Sepp Hanfstengel is made Mayor and the Baron von Eich dismisses those workers who refuse to join the National Socialists. The incarceration of members of the "Bund der Frankenbauern", the persecution of an allegedly Jewish doctor Böhm, and the direct parallel between the

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<sup>201</sup> Scharrer, Maulwürfe, p.128.

Reichstag fire of 1933 and the outbreak of fire on the Baron's village estate, relate local conflicts to those on a national level, giving events in the village representative significance, and illustrate the futility of attempts to bring about reform within the system.

The final optimism of Scharrer's novel, however, lies in the double symbolism of its title. On the one hand, as we have seen, the farmer's property consciousness makes him blind - here again a possible reference to an attribute of the mole - to the common interests of the oppressed and exploited under the conditions of class conflict in capitalist society. The term "Maulwürfe" has, however, a further positive meaning in reference to the anticipation of revolutionary change through the proletariat. Scharrer stresses the need for class solidarity and the political nature of class struggle. As he has one character comment, an awareness of common interest, group consciousness and collective action based on identification with those in the same position of economic disadvantage, are the prerequisites for the revolutionary transformation of the social order:

"Und wenn mir klan Leut zsammhaltn, nacha wird's  
nimmer lang dauern, und's schaut anders aus auf der  
Welt."<sup>202</sup>

Scharrer uses "Maulwürfe" in this context as a symbolic name for the oppressed proletariat and points to the necessity of a collective revolutionary struggle to overthrow the system from its foundations:

"Und wenn aner dös begreift und zu an andern a Wurt  
sagt, wer uns drosselt, nacha derfindn die Herrn  
allerhand Sachn, um an aufrechtn Menschn zum  
Schweign z'bringa, weils wissn, dös is a Maulwurf

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202 Scharrer, Maulwürfe, p.259.

in ihrn Reich, und wenn nu aner und nu zwanzg  
und nu hundert kumma, nacha werdn die  
Fundamenta untergrobn und ihr saubers Gschäft  
durchschaut und aus is."<sup>203</sup>

Since, under the total political domination of fascism, the proletarian cause could fulfil at best a subversive protest function, the outcome of the revolutionary struggle is only suggested, not specified. Scharrer concludes his novel, therefore, with hope and cautious optimism, expressed in the allusion to the continuation of the struggle in illegality:

"' Wenn dös niedergeht, wirds einschlogn, daß mancher denkt, itz kummt Sodom und Gomorra.' ...

Die Nacht lag schwarz und schwer über dem Dorf. Einige Gäste begleiteten uns. Andere waren bereits vorausgegangen, aus dem Lichtkreis der Wirtshauslampe. Sie warteten auf uns."<sup>204</sup>

Scharrer writes from a new perspective for a new public.

The bourgeois writer, we have seen, constructed the farmer and his environment according to middle-class conventions, values and ideals: the inalienability of private property, a high regard for personal labour, the expectation of fulfilment and success through personal achievement, self-reliance, social conservatism, and local patriotism. Bourgeois emotional anti-capitalism attacked the modern age from moral premises as acquisitive, materialist, corrupt and decadent, and escaped into a reactionary, anti-urban agrarian ideology with associations of social harmony and economic autarchy.

For the moral perception of capitalism Scharrer substitutes the Marxist economic interpretation of class struggle between labour and capital, between the landless workers and the propertied classes. The conflict is not externalised into the ethical,

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<sup>203</sup> Scharrer, Maulwürfe, p.259.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p.345.

cultural, or biological polarity of city and land, industry and agriculture, present and past, but arises from contradictions inherent in the political, socio-economic structure.

The socialist novel expresses not the conservative historical consciousness of the traditional middle classes but the progressive view of the proletariat as the vanguard of social change. Maulwürfe is not an illustration of generally valid moral, cultural, or racial principles, but an interpretation of a specific historical period in terms of Marxist class theory. Values are shown to derive from the class context. Writing from the position of the revolutionary proletariat Scharrer substitutes collective solidarity for sturdy individualism, protest for withdrawal and political detachment, class consciousness for nationalism, revolution for conservatism as social ideals. Not the individual but society must change. He confronts the fiction of the harmonious "Volksgemeinschaft" with the village as a cross-section of class society, the bourgeois family idyll with poverty, fear, envy and greed, the myth of the eternal farmer with the victims of class exploitation.

The shift from bourgeois idealism to Marxist didacticism has involved also a significant change in literary technique. Scharrer, concerned not with an individual hero but with the social configuration, makes the fate of his protagonist representative of his class. While some minor figures, introduced merely to prove the author's case, never become rounded characters in their own right, and while the sometimes bewildering profusion of events and characters impairs the clarity of the work, Scharrer's characters are nevertheless real persons against a convincing historical background.



The merit of Scharrer's work lies above all in its value as a historical document. The author clearly reveals the contradiction between the National Socialist anti-capitalist programme and its pro-capitalist practice. Its agrarian policy, he shows, instead of furthering the creation of a stable rural middle class, helped to harden class conflict on the land, consolidated the position of the agricultural bourgeoisie, and accelerated the concomitant proletarianisation of the lower classes.

## ERWIN STRITTMATTER

At this point it seems appropriate to mention that of necessity the analysis of Strittmatter's works differs in certain respects from the previous discussion. The representative nature of his works demands at times a more detailed examination than was the case with earlier writers. This is due to the fact that, for the purposes of this study, which sets out to compare, in the specific genre of the agrarian novel, the approach of bourgeois with that of socialist writers, Strittmatter is treated as a representative socialist author. He has professed his personal debt to the DDR and pledged his loyalty with the words:

"Ohne die Deutsche Demokratische Republik wäre ich nicht, was ich bin, wußte ich nicht, was ich weiß, könnte ich meine künftigen Bücher nicht schreiben."<sup>205</sup>

This means that his own development as an author is linked with changes in official "Kulturpolitik", and that his works as a consequence reflect not merely a personal philosophy but conform to Party (SED) ideological guidelines. It is necessary, therefore, to regard him both as an author in his own right and as a spokesman for the East German regime.

Erwin Strittmatter (1912- ) was born and grew up in the Niederlausitz village of Spremburg, the son of a baker and small farmer. In his early years he took up several occupations including baker's apprentice, animal - keeper, chauffeur and factory - worker. A member of the political groups "Naturfreunde" and

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205 Quoted in: Helmut Hauptmann, "Wie Erwin Strittmatter Schriftsteller wurde". Neue Deutsche Literatur 7, Heft 7, 1959, p.122.

"Solidarität" he was arrested for a short time in 1934 by the National Socialists and deserted from the army shortly before the end of the war. After the war he took up again the baker's trade and received property in the land reform. In 1947 he joined the SED and became Mayor of seven small municipalities. For several years he was active as a journalist of the "Märkische Volksstimme". From 1959 to 1961 he was First Secretary of the "Schriftstellerverband". In the mid-1950's Strittmatter moved into the country and now lives and works on a collective farm in Dollgow, north of Berlin.

Although he had already made literary attempts, especially in the field of poetry, Strittmatter was thirty-eight before his first work appeared. He received national prizes in 1953 for the play Katzgraben produced in collaboration with Bertolt Brecht,<sup>206</sup> in 1955 for Tinko which was filmed two years later, and in 1964 for Ole Bienkopp. The play Die Holländerbraut earned him the Lessing Prize in 1961.

Strittmatter's literary production can be divided roughly into four periods.

The first includes the retrospective novels Ochsenkutscher (1950) and Der Wundertäter I (1957), "Bildungsromane" which share autobiographical elements and the historical background of the Weimar Republic.

The second phase of his writing career embraces Tinko (1954) and his two plays Katzgraben (1953) and Die Holländerbraut (1960) in which Strittmatter, turning to contemporary themes, deals with the personal problems created by land reform and the

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<sup>206</sup> See Bertolt Brecht, "Katzgraben - Notate". Sinn und Form 5, Heft 3/4, 1953. Also in: B.B., Schriften zum Theater 7, 1948-1956. (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1964), pp.71-186.

transition to socialist collectivism. These works are characterised by a dominance of ideology over plot, a stylised presentation of historical development, set political conflicts, and stereotyped characterisation.

The third phase is represented by the controversial collectivisation novel Ole Bienkopp (1963) which gives evidence of a new recognition of social complexity and examines the role of the individual worker in the established socialist community.

In the fourth phase of his career, which leads us up to the present, Strittmatter turns to generally human problems, still within the context of socialist society but often without a marked ideological bias or didactic intent. This period encompasses Schulzenhofer Kramkalender (1966), 3/4 Hundert Kleingeschichten (1971) and Die blaue Nachtigall oder der Anfang von Etwas (1972), contemplative observations of nature, recollections or philosophical reflections, Ein Dienstag im Sommer: 16 Romane im Stenogramm (1969), studies in the private sphere of everyday life, and Der Wundertäter II (1973), an examination of the function of art and the artist in society.

Significantly - for the village is the scene for the majority of his works - Ochsenkutscher, the novel with which Strittmatter made his literary debut, is set against the background of a Niederlausitz village in the Weimar Republic up till the seizure of power by the National Socialists. Its historical background thus coincides with that of Scharrer's Maulwürfe. While it did not enjoy great popularity, it is an important work in so far as it presents village life under capitalism from an original perspective and reveals certain characteristic stylistic features and critical methods of the author.

Ochsenkutscher is the account, in the form of the traditional "Bildungsroman", of the youth of Lope, the son of a poor working family. Through his own experiences and the influence of symbolic characters round him, each of whom holds a different philosophy of life, the passive yet reflective hero passes through a learning process and finally reaches his own conclusions.

Lope's mentors are Ferdinand, the secretary of the Junker Herr von Rendsburg's estate, the shepherd Malten, and the socialist Blemska. These characters, who represent the diversity of political opinion in the village, are the formative influences on the hero, and it is the contrast between their philosophies on which the conflict within the hero is based.

Ferdinand, who plays a dominant role in Lope's early development, has become aware of contradictions within class society but lacks the conviction to draw the political consequences. Strittmatter satirises him in comic encounters with village women, and his classical ideal of the harmonious individual, bound by bourgeois conventions of personality and self-sufficiency:

"... es ist gewissermaßen so, daß der Mensch erst etwas für sich werden muß ... das heißt, er muß sich selbst befreien ..."207

- fails to satisfy Lope's inquiries about the society round him. Malten, also politically uncommitted, similarly offers no convincing solution, for he despises the worker and becomes a social outsider:

"Woher sollte Schäfer Malten auch wissen, wie es in der Welt zugeht? Er kommt ja kaum zu den Menschen in das Dorf. Er schaut mit seinen großen grauen Augen von seinem Heidhügel herunter und lacht."208

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207 Erwin Strittmatter, Ochsenkutscher (Frankfurt/M.: Röderberg, 1976), p.222.

208 Ibid., p.234.

Blemska, alone, recognises that capitalist society rests on the opposition of class interests and that the workers must unite to change the system:

"Ich bin nur ein Krümel. Alle zusammen sind wir erst ein Kuchen."<sup>209</sup>

The individual must become politically committed before protest against injustice can be effective:

"Wir alle müssen noch viel lernen und Farbe kriegen..."<sup>210</sup>

Unconvinced by Ferdinand's indecisiveness and Malten's cynicism, Lope decides to leave the village with Blemska, not from a conscious political conviction but, a fellow victim of National Socialism, as the only escape from political persecution after being found in possession of subversive literature.

While Strittmatter retains the overall structural pattern of the traditional "Bildungsroman" in so far as he leads his hero to the "right" view of life (here in the political as well as in the moral sense), the process of character formation is set in the new historical context of capitalist class society. The conclusion of the hero's development - persecution and exile - demonstrates implicitly the falsity of the pattern of bourgeois idealism, by which the virtuous hero, unhindered by social barriers, is ultimately rewarded for willing service and unremitting toil with personal fulfilment, material prosperity, and social advancement. Strittmatter refutes the possibility of the "happy end" under the conditions of class struggle. Instead, Lope's road to maturity and, although limited by environment and perspective, to political enlightenment, only confirms that, as the title "Ochsenkutscher" suggests, he,

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209 Strittmatter, Ochsenkutscher, p.215.

210 Ibid., p.326.

like the other villagers, is trapped in the hierarchy of capitalist society.

This emphasis of socialist didacticism not on personality and private values but on social determination, which we have noted already in Scharrer's works, is illustrated by Strittmatter's use of the child-perspective. The reader experiences events, the village and its inhabitants not primarily through a model identification figure as the central participant in the action, but through a critical observer, the boy Lope. By manipulating the naive unprejudiced view of the child the author is able to expose the contradictory nature of accepted ideas without intervening directly. In this way Strittmatter presents village life in a new light.

The critical function of this perspective "from within" arises from the discrepancy between what the hero expects and the true situation. The myth of success through personal worth, which provided bourgeois writers with a legitimation of existing property relationships, is exposed as a fallacy by Lope's naive logic. Instead, the reader is led to conclude, property relationships reflect the injustice of class differences:

"Vater säuft. Das weiß Lope. Lope wird nichts erben als das Recht auf seine Grabgrube.- Viele Fragen kletten sich an Lope. Er wird nicht saufen. Wie lange muß man nicht saufen, bis man Vaters Land vom gnädigen Herrn zurückerhält? - Er gab Lope das Buch. Vielleicht gibt er ihm auch das Land."<sup>211</sup>

Poverty appears here not as evidence of mismanagement and immorality but as class destiny.

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<sup>211</sup> Strittmatter, Ochsenkutscher, p.125.

While the bourgeois writer Wilhelm von Polenz, in the interests of class harmony, proposed palliative measures as the solution to the social evils of oppression and discontent, and envisaged the aristocrat as the responsible agent of welfare and reform, the benevolence and paternalism of Strittmatter's Junker von Rendsburg is shown to be a mask for the unbroken exploitation of the worker. In this context the class character of property relationships is again shown to contradict the traditional work - reward pattern:

"Er [Lope] muß zum Beispiel darüber nachdenken, wie es kommt, daß der neue Graf auf dem Schloß leben kann, ohne zu arbeiten. Wenn Mutter, Vater und er eine Woche nicht arbeiten, können sie in der anderen nicht mehr leben."<sup>212</sup>

The device of the child-perspective as a means of social criticism is used also to attack the Church. The traditional bourgeois values of religion and piety, carrying associations of a just social order and patriarchal social interchange, become, according to Marxist rationalist argument, a further instrument of the ruling classes for the domination and exploitation of their subjects. A sermon by the village priest who preaches humility, obedience, and respect for authority is presented from an unusual point of view, namely through the eyes of card-playing children. Strittmatter thus alienates the reader from the text and appeals to his critical faculties, indicating the true reactionary role of the Church as the tool of capitalist exploitation. The use of the naive perspective which, an essentially non-analytical stylistic feature, achieves its effect indirectly, nevertheless often lacks

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<sup>212</sup> Strittmatter, Ochsenkutscher, p.246.



subtlety and becomes, as it does here, rather superficial and obvious.

The juxtaposition of sharply contrasting situations or episodes is another satirical means of exposing class differences and similarly provokes a critical response from the reader. The Junker von Rendsburg's eulogy for the deceased Empress appears ridiculous when the ceremony takes place adjacent to a boisterous meeting of the Social-Democrat "Arbeitererradfahrerverein". And the contrast between the needs of the Junker and the workers illustrates the material gap between the classes:

"Die Kartoffeln haben ihren Frostknacks. Jetzt sind sie gut für die Schnapsbrennerei des gnädigen Herrn. Die arbeitslosen Bergleute hüten ihre Kartoffeln wie Kummerkinder vor dem Frost. So verschieden sind die Wünsche der Menschen."<sup>213</sup>

Here also, however, the naive pose appears exaggerated and contrived.

As the preceding discussion may have indicated, while they both espouse the cause of the oppressed proletariat in their novels, Strittmatter's depiction of village life differs markedly from that of his forerunner Adam Scharrer both in style and purpose.

Scharrer, who intended his writing as an incitement to action, leads his characters to awareness of the political, social and economic processes which affect their lives. They reflect on their own situation and finally reach a perception of the mechanism of class society. Ochsenkutscher, however, while in content and ideology a successor of the anti-fascist literature in the Weimar Republic, is written from the perspective not of the oppressed proletariat but from that of the victorious working class: by a

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<sup>213</sup> Strittmatter, Ochsenkutscher, p.297.

citizen of the new socialist republic.<sup>214</sup> This is demonstrated by the attention to character, episode and situation rather than depiction of class conflict and historical background, and by the choice of the hero: the substitution of the naive observer for the class-conscious proletarian.

Like many works in the post-war period Ochsenkutscher reflects a personal need to come to terms with the past: the Weimar Republic, fascism and the war. This literature, Werner Brettschneider observes, was not revolutionary literature of protest with a propagandist intention, but retrospective and analytical, coloured by autobiographical elements:

"Die Bemühungen, den Blick, der allzuleicht von den noch offenen Wunden der Jahre zwischen 1933 und 1945 gebannt wurde, auf die gesamte erste Hälfte des Jahrhunderts zu erweitern und die tieferen Zusammenhänge darstellend zu begreifen, wurden nicht so sehr von der distanzierenden Neugier des Historikers hervorgebracht als von dem Bedürfnis, sich selbst zu deuten und sich selbst zu rechtfertigen."<sup>215</sup>

This ambiguous situation - looking back on an era to which he was personally and emotionally bound yet which had now become part of the historical past of capitalism - allowed the socialist writer, with the advantage of retrospection, to portray more realistically than contemporary anti-fascist authors such as Adam Scharrer, who were concerned with the immediate political impact of their writing, the true subjection and political manipulation of the rural working class.

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214 See: Kühn, Welt und Gestalt des Bauern in der deutschsprachigen Literatur, p.409.

215 Werner Brettschneider, Zwischen literarischer Autonomie und Staatsdienst: die Literatur in der DDR (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1974), p.56.

Like the harnessed oxen they drive on the Junker's fields, the villagers in Strittmatter's novel are bound to the good will of their oppressors. They work, like Lope, either on the Junker's estate or in his cousin's mine. The wretched fate of Lope's parents is typical. The father, his modest ambitions frustrated by the Junker, resorts to petty theft to eke out a living and finds consolation in boasting a primitive patriotism. Habitual abject submission to his superiors makes him finally a willing and mindless tool of the National Socialists. Lope's mother, hardened by the daily struggle for existence but exhausted by futile anarchical protest, eventually loses her reason.

While the bourgeois novelist made the artificial isolation of the countryside the setting for free development and for the fulfilment and satisfaction attendant on the simple working existence, Strittmatter shows the part played by the real narrowness of provincial life in the deformation of the rural worker under class oppression. The author explains how, under the stultifying effects of the exploitation which was their class destiny, the provincial mentality of the rural proletariat and the guilelessness which was a result of political isolation from the urban centres of class struggle were characteristics which could be transformed into servility and manipulated to political ends.

The villagers are shown to be enslaved not only socially and economically but also mentally, their deep-seated passivity a product of their daily struggle for survival:

"Sie sind keine Kämpfer und keine Dulder und leben alle. Sie sind wie die Läuse der Erde und suchen sich die Stellen zum Saugen, wo sie nicht abgekratzt werden können."<sup>216</sup>

This very disposition to acceptance has created an aversion to political commitment which accounts for Lope's inability to distinguish clear-cut social groups in the village:

"Du wirst es noch gewahr werden ... es geht um die Klasse', hat Blemska Lope gesagt. Aber Lope hat festgestellt, daß alles im Dorfe durcheinandergeht ... keine Klasse ... es ist ein großer Fitz, und er ist unglücklich, daß er so dumm ist."<sup>217</sup>

The subjection of the mass of the villagers is mirrored in their unreflective and politically uninterested outlook. The workers' union is nothing more than an entertainment club, the National Socialists for the locals "Wickelgamaschenkerle". The disparity between the characters' perception of their surroundings and the actual nature of their class situation becomes clear where the author intrudes as a critical observer. The marriage of the Junker's daughter, an occasion where the splendour of the celebrations makes the class differences especially striking, gives Strittmatter the opportunity to demonstrate the enslavement of the proletariat through their submissive compliance with the system:

"Jaja, diese Pracht! Wie sie fliegt und zischt! Es dreht sich, besternt sich und kreiselt. Es kracht, knallt, wirbelt und zittert. Da hocken die Gutsarbeiter stumm auf der Scheunentenne wie weiland die Hirten, als der Stern des Herrn am Himmel erstrahlte. Es tut sich ihnen eine himmlische Welt auf, in der sie Fremde sind. Sie entlocken der Erde das Korn. Sie säen, pflügen, ernten und dreschen es.

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126 Strittmatter, Ochsenkutscher, p.231.

127 Ibid., p.232.

Sie schleppen die Säcke auf die Böden des gnädigen Herrn. Ihr Schweiß tropft auf die Treppenstufen der Kornböden. Die Speichertüren schließen sich: sie sind von der Frucht ihrer Arbeit getrennt. Später, wenn der gnädige Herr die Ernte in Geld umwandelt, dürfen sie noch einmal ihre Rücken an die Frucht ihrer Jahresarbeit legen. Sie schleppen die Säcke vom Boden zu den Fahrzeugen und laden sie in der Stadt wieder ab. Alles andere bleibt ihnen sonst unsichtbar. Aber heute sehen sie auch noch das umgewandelte Geld am Himmel zerbersten und zerpuffen. Und sie sagen: 'Ooh!' und sie sagen: 'Ahhh!' Sie sind für ein Weilchen glücklich, wenn der Widerschein der Herrschaftsfreuden sich auf ihren Gesichtern spiegelt."<sup>218</sup>

This passage illustrates the villagers' inability to detach themselves from their surroundings and examine them critically. Rather, their subjective, emotional response to life makes them lackeys of authority.

In accordance with middle-class nationalism the bourgeois farmer-hero worked for himself and submitted of his own free will to the demands of political authority (the state in the guise of the "Volk"). Strittmatter, on the other hand, examines critically the bondage to the soil of the worker who toils for his capitalist oppressors, in terms of alienation, enslavement and exploitation, i.e. in relation not to the independent producer but to the victims of class society. In this context the submission to authority is not interpreted positively in terms of middle-class morality but negatively as the product of proletarian subjection.

In view of the influence of National Socialist propaganda on the land against the background of a mounting crisis in agriculture,<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Strittmatter, Ochsenkutscher, pp.255-256.

<sup>219</sup> National Socialism found access to the rural population more readily than to the often socialist-organised industrial workers, as its election successes, especially from 1930 onwards, in predominantly rural regions such as Schleswig-Holstein testify. See: Karl Bracher, Die deutsche Diktatur. Entstehung, Struktur, Folgen des Nationalsozialismus (Köln: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1969), pp.159, 167 ff. passim.

especially among the unemployed and lower middle classes, Strittmatter's portrayal of village life, with the benefit of hindsight and notwithstanding regional differences,<sup>220</sup> represents a more authentic perception of social reality than Scharrer's evocation of political activism and revolutionary protest. Strittmatter seeks here not to convince but to explain, and adds a dimension to the interpretation of class struggle on the land by establishing the relationship in the rural proletariat between class position, provincial mentality, and political manipulation. The significance of Ochsenkutscher lies thus not in its social criticism which, although conveyed in a novel fashion, is of a conventional character, nor in the analysis of fascism from its historical, socio-economic class origins - this Scharrer had done before him with greater clarity-, but in his explanation of the appeal and rise of National Socialism from social conditions on the land. As a personal document Strittmatter's novel can be seen as the new socialist citizen's confrontation with a capitalist past as with the past of his own youth.

While in Tinko Strittmatter turns from the past to contemporary reality, stylistic features of this first work - the framework of the "Bildungsroman" and the use of the naive child-perspective as a critical medium - recur in his later writing.

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220 It is probable that the rural proletariat in the backward North-East, under the domination of the powerful East Elbian Junkers, were less likely to be politically organised than their counterparts in the South.

MARXIST AGRARIAN THEORY AND  
LAND REFORM IN EAST GERMANY

A discussion of the agrarian novel in East Germany necessitates some understanding of the policy it was officially urged to promote. Agrarian policy there has been dictated by a combination of Marxist economic theory, political pragmatism, and socialist ideology. It can be divided into three main phases: redistribution, collectivisation, and co-operation.

In September 1945 the Soviet military authorities ordered the expropriation of landed estates over one hundred hectares and of the entire property of National Socialists and war criminals. In accordance with the socialist perception of social justice and equality, the polarisation of the landed Junkers and the working class, a feature of rural society east of the Elbe before the war, was eliminated, and the liberated land was distributed to refugees and landless agricultural labourers.<sup>221</sup> Small allotments of up to twenty hectares were thereby created. Moreover, dictated by economic necessity, this operation, completed by the end of 1947, was a move to rebuild production after the extensive destruction of the war and to provide employment for refugees. The redistribution was also a tactical measure to win the political support of

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221 In total 3298 million hectares were distributed, two-thirds into private hands, one-third to public production. (DDR Handbuch [Herausgegeben vom Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen. Wissenschaftliche Leitung P. Ludz unter Mitwirkung von J. Kuppe] [Köln: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1975], p.14.).

the rural proletariat by satisfying their hunger for land.<sup>222</sup>

It was regarded as a political, economic, and social necessity.

The decision of the Central Committee of the SED for collectivisation in July 1952 ushered in the second phase of land reform. In keeping with the socialist belief in the injustice of private ownership and in order to complete the equalization of the rural population, the land was brought under communal ownership (the creation of collectives, "Landwirtschaftliche Produktions - genossenschaften") or state control (the formation of public estates known as "Volkseigene Güter"), the farmer became an agricultural labourer, and production was subjected to a unified planning system. Three types of collective farm were created in which the farmer surrendered land, stock and machinery to various extents. In 1960 collectivisation was accelerated and completed under political and economic pressure.<sup>223</sup> This re-organisation of agriculture represented a change in production from a private to a collective basis and was justified not only on ideological grounds but as a response to economic necessity: the small holdings, it was argued, had proven unprofitable and the creation of large production units was supposed to make possible investment in machinery and equipment, and economies in labour.

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222 David Mitrany bluntly interprets this move as an exercise in political expediency: "... Communism first encouraged the peasants to help themselves to land, so that it might have its hands free to grasp political power, and then used that political power to deprive the peasants of land." (Mitrany, Marx against the Peasant, p.228.) See also: Konrad Merkel and Hans Immler (eds.), DDR Landwirtschaft in der Diskussion (Köln: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1972), p.8. (Introduction)

223 In the first five months of 1960 the number of agricultural collectives rose from 10,465 to 19,261, and the percentage of total agricultural land farmed by them from 45.1% to 84.2%. (DDR Handbuch, p.507.)



The years since 1960 (the so-called "co-operation phase") have witnessed a trend towards larger, self-sufficient, specialised units, inter - and supra - collective co-ordination, and more effective use of modern technology.

The problems arising from these measures in the creation of a society based on socialist principles became material for authors such as Erwin Strittmatter whose background made life on the land a topic of special interest. In response to official demands for partisanship, i.e. for the commitment of the writer in his art to the cause of socialism - the agrarian novel, like all other spheres of literature, in its depiction of social conflict, assumed direct and immediate relevance as the ideological instrument of the state.<sup>224</sup> This was the case especially in the early years of socialist construction when the artist was enjoined to assist in the attainment of political goals by contributing through literary examples to the development of a socialist awareness in his public. This new function of the agrarian novel, as an apology for socialism, is illustrated by Strittmatter's Tinko (1954).

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224 It could be argued that the "Blut und Boden" literature under the National Socialist regime was also, in this sense, political, but it was only indirectly so, for the majority of works whose authors were given official recognition had been written before the Third Reich came into existence. See: Strothmann, Nationalsozialistische Literaturpolitik.

### TINKO

The action of Tinko spans the years from 1947 to 1949, a historically significant era because it was marked, on the one hand, by small individual production, the legacy of the first agrarian reform, and on the other by preparations - the creation of machine pools ("~~M~~aschinenausleihstationen") and co-operative organisations ("Bauernhilfen") as prototypes of communal production - for the liquidation of private property through collective ownership of agricultural production.

Tinko, a boy of about ten years of age, lives with his grandfather, the farmer August Kraske and grandmother in the Lausitz village of Märzbach. The arrival in the village of Tinko's father, Ernst, from captivity in Russia sets the conflict in motion. Tinko, in the power of his reactionary and authoritarian grandfather, at first regards him with distrust which grows when the stranger enthusiastically gives improbable accounts of progressive production methods on the Russian collectives, and of the humane working conditions there. However, while a collective spirit is growing in the village under Party leadership, the acquisitive Kraske, who refuses to abandon his obsolescent farming methods and change his individualist thinking, isolates himself from the socialist community and vents on Tinko his anger and frustration at a world he can no longer comprehend. His brutality alienates the boy and finally drives him to his father. The old man's death at the conclusion of the novel signifies on a personal level the end of tyranny and exploitation for Tinko and his

grandmother, and at the same time demonstrates the irresistible progress of socialism.

Whereas, in Ochsenkutscher, the naive perspective has a primarily critical function (Lope's reflections expose the contradictions of accepted ideas and in this way reveal indirectly the class character of the village society round him), Strittmatter uses the child-medium in Tinko chiefly to convey the immediacy of his hero's emotions to the reader. The choice of the child Tinko himself as narrator is designed to involve the reader directly with the characters and the action.

The dramatic tension of the novel arises from the emotional development of the hero. Like Lope, Tinko is faced with a decision vital to his future but, since he is younger, it is determined by his feelings, not by logical argument or reason. Tinko vacillates between subjection to the will of his grandfather and fear of reprisal if he disobeys, and a child's longing for affection. The mercilessness of the old man frightens him and brings him disfavour in school, for forced labour on the fields allows him neither the time nor energy to study:

"Jeden Mittag denke ich, sie werden mich einmal in meiner Kirschhöhle vergessen, wenn sie zum Ernten auf die Felder ziehen. Sie vergessen mich nicht. Ich bin eine Arbeitskraft. Sobald Großvater auf dem Hof nach mir ruft, ist's mir, als ob mich jemand mit Disteln peitsche."<sup>225</sup>

The conflict in Tinko is heightened as his will and that of Kraske clash more and more frequently. His revolt against unjust authority is portrayed as a process of emancipation, and leads to a point of alliance neither with the grandfather nor with the father:

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<sup>225</sup> Erwin Strittmatter, Tinko (Berlin [DDR]: Kinderbuchverlag, 1976), p.112.

"Nein, ich will nicht mehr beim Großvater  
schlafen ... Ich will auch jetzt nicht beim  
Heimkehrer schlafen, nein. Ich will mit mir  
allein sein, wenn ich einschlafe und aufstehe."226

Tinko's initial mistrust of his father and fear of neglect when he marries the Polish refugee Frau Clary are gradually dispersed by their sincerity and concern, and in them the boy finds his new family.

The child's emotional development receives symbolic value as a reflection of the political situation in the village, for through the struggle between Tinko's grandfather and father for his affection Strittmatter presents the conflict between opposed social ideologies.<sup>227</sup> The boy's liberation from Kraske and decision for his father is thus linked with the author's didactic intention: to demonstrate the moral superiority of collective striving over the capitalist principle of private ownership. This is achieved by Strittmatter's characterisation of the individual producer.

Kraske, the individual property owner, is constructed as a caricature of selfishness and depravity. The obsessive desire for gain which preoccupies him:

"Die Raffsucht hat ihn. Geld stapeln will er.  
Niemand tut ihm recht, niemand tut ihm genug.  
Nur er, nur er."228

- is shown to have its origins in his past and to be a psychological remnant of capitalist society. Before the war he worked for the Junker von Buchowitz in exchange for the tenancy of

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226 Strittmatter, Tinko, pp.190-191.

227 The conflict can even be viewed in dialectical terms of thesis (grandfather), antithesis (father), and synthesis (Tinko). See: Barbara Einhorn, Der Roman in der DDR 1949 - 1969. Die Gestaltung des Verhältnisses von Individuum und Gesellschaft - Eine Analyse der Erzählstruktur (Diss. [Masch.] Dunedin [New Zealand], 1972), p.182.

228 Strittmatter, Tinko, p.36.

a small plot of land, and during the agrarian reform used his position as Mayor to obtain the best land in the village. The self-interest which makes Kraske, the "Neubauer", refuse to surrender property so recently gained and hide his produce rather than deliver it to the state, is reflected also in the farmer's personal relationships.

Kraske is cast as a ruthless employer. He summarily dismisses Frau Clary when his son Ernst, in whom he sees a helper and successor, returns home, and is a tyrannical master over Tinko and the grandmother. In contrast with the union of the father and Frau Clary based on affection and equality, the grandfather is portrayed as a brutal and domineering husband, the grandmother as fearful and submissive. Here also Strittmatter makes Kraske's economic situation responsible. The farmer's property consciousness which alienates him from the village community - he refuses to borrow machines from the village co-operative for fear that he will be obliged to lend his horse in exchange - is shown to extend even to personal relationships, for the farmer values an animal higher than his wife:

"Summa summarum: Pferd und Frau verborgt kein Bauer.  
Lieber die Frau. Selbst ist der Mann!"<sup>229</sup>

Private ownership, Strittmatter argues, albeit here overstating his case, deforms even family relationships, thereby obstructing social justice and progress.

Moreover, in accordance with the Marxist belief in the economic superiority of large production units, Strittmatter demonstrates that private ownership is incompatible with

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<sup>229</sup> Strittmatter, Tinko, p.80.

technological improvement. Kraske's adherence to time-honoured but obsolescent farming methods, which forms a barrier to the technological advancement necessary to overcome the need for exploitation of labour, is made another attribute of the property owner:

"Mit der Lochmaschine kann man in einer Stunde ein ganzes Feldstück belöchern. Großvater kann nach einer Stunde selbst Kartoffeln legen helfen und sich eine Bürde vor den Bauch binden. Das will Großvater nicht. 'Das ist Weiberarbeit', sagt er. Er ist ein Bauer, ein Pferdebauer."<sup>230</sup>

While the rest of the village awaits the arrival of tractors, Kraske purchases a second horse, and his incapacity to deliver the state quotas testifies to the inefficiency of private production. His conviction that he can maintain his independent status with traditional farming methods is only an illusion. Mechanised agriculture utilized by collective effort proves superior.

The new interpretation of technological progress in Tinko reflects a changed emphasis in values and ideals.

In the bourgeois agrarian novel (except in its liberal guise in Jörn Uhl where it provides the means to the personal fulfilment and social integration of the hero) industrialisation appears as the accompaniment of agricultural ruin and is associated with the negative features of the modern age: economic competition, class rivalry, the desire for profit, and worker-alienation. Thus in Polenz's Der Büttnerbauer it serves the interests of class egoism (the aristocrat Count Saland erects a factory on farming land), and in Waggenerl's Schweres Blut mechanisation, in the form of a modern saw-mill, threatens to sever the mystical

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<sup>230</sup> Strittmatter, Tinko, p.80.

links between the farmer and his soil. In contrast to the advancements of the modern age which separate Man from his origins, the bourgeois writer established the physical toil and self-denial of the traditional farmer as enduring moral principles and signs of personal worth.

The socialist writer however, with the aim of comparing the exploitation of labour under private production with the progressiveness and justice of socialist collectivism, stresses the human and social benefits of technology over manual toil. Kraske is not only himself an exploiter of labour, but also a victim of the capitalist landowner Kimpel. Under the conditions of private production and competition exploitation is shown to be increased by technology. The "Freundschaft" which Kraske imagines he shares with Kimpel is revealed as an illusion. Kimpel deceives him by delivering the wrong seed and uses his material resources to manipulate Kraske by flattery and blackmail, for in his reaping machine he has the power to ruin or save the reputation of the old man who needs it to harvest his crops in time.

The role of technology is seen not as a moral issue but in relation to the socio-economic question of ownership. With the change from private to communal production the machine, symbol of technological advancement, brings not corruption and exploitation but social progress and justice. Strittmatter thus substitutes mechanisation for human labour as a social ideal. The tractor, which seals the ruin of Kimpel and Kraske, brings the end of the exploitation and fear with which, for Tinko, Kraske's traditional

farming methods are associated, and becomes for the boy the harbinger of a new era:

"Wenn ich die reifenden Halme sehe, steigt eine alte Angst in mir auf. Die Angst scheint mit mir geboren zu sein .... Ich habe Angst vor dem Geschrei und Geschimpf des Großvaters, vor dem Geseufz der Großmutter, vor der Müdigkeit meiner Arme, die die Garben nicht mehr halten wollen. Reifende Halme holen alle Qualen der Getreideernte in mir hoch. Ich möchte davonrennen. Ich brauche nicht davonzurennen. Es wird mich dieses Jahr niemand zur Erntearbeit treiben."<sup>231</sup>

The degeneration of capitalism is made responsible also for the persistence of ignorance and superstition. Kimpel fabricates the rumour that his stepmother is a witch as an excuse to ignore her welfare. Kraske's vituperations against education and his animosity towards the Russians are similarly rooted in prejudice and ignorance:

"... Ein Buch verdirbt den Menschen schneller als Schnaps<sup>232</sup>... Das russische Gift haben sie geschluckt. Zusammenschmeißen, alles zusammenschmeißen wollen sie. Einen Kolchos draus machen. Bettelmänner aus uns machen, ohne Habe, ohne nichts. Die Quecken werden ihnen zum Fenster hineinwachsen. Die Faulheit hat sich unter ihnen breitgemacht ... das Laster ... das Laster!"<sup>233</sup>

Against the bigotry typical, the reader is led to believe, of the capitalist mentality, the author stresses the national and international import of the transformations in Märzbach. The village in Tinko is the setting for the illustration of historical development. Through the elimination of private enterprise and the introduction of co-operative forms of production, the modernisation of agriculture and the manifestation of state planning through the

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<sup>231</sup> Strittmatter, Tinko, p.338.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p.177.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., pp.278-279.



quota system, it is shown to be part of a total social and economic unit. This is emphasised by the leading role of the Party in the social and economic reconstruction of the village along socialist lines as political authority and initiator of social progress, and relates local events to those on a national level. Moreover, the nationalist emphasis of the bourgeois novel, which culminated in the chauvinism of "Blut und Boden", makes way in Tinko for the vision, under socialism, of a new era of international friendship and co-operation. The Russian "kolchos" is held up as the model for the East German co-operative and Strittmatter describes how the Young Pioneers, the youth group of the SED, make a visit of good will to their Polish neighbours.

While the bourgeois writer stressed the value of individual striving and achievement against the pressures of historical change, the Marxist theory of the historical necessity of the transition from individual to collective production involves the affirmation, not rejection of social change, and the attachment of value not to the autonomous individual but to the progressive social forces. The transformation from bourgeois idealism to socialist didacticism is illustrated by the new presentation of the conflict between the individual and historical forces.

Accordingly, the socialist transition to collective production is to be presented not merely as a desirable goal, both in terms of productivity and as a moral imperative, but also as an historical necessity. To this end Strittmatter makes the outcome of the social conflict a foregone conclusion. Both the reactionary Kimpel and Kraske still hope for a return of the old social order but their expectations no longer correspond to the true historical situation.

The capitalist Kimpel's influence in the village is, we are told, in decline. His workers rebel and only a few of the aged and weak like Kraske and the simpleton Fiedel - Fimpel can be persuaded to follow his commands. His thinking is in futile opposition to the inevitability of socialism:

"Dem Kahlwicht ist die Zeit zu lang. Er lauscht in das Dorf hinein, ob nicht bald alles wieder so werden wird, wie es war.... Es ist fast, als ob das Neue überall zunimmt. Die alte Zeit wird mehr und mehr beiseite geschoben."<sup>234</sup>

Similarly, in the socialist community founded on the principles of mutual aid and co-operation, the stubborn independence of the farmer Kraske, summed up in his motto "Der Mensch kann viel, wenn er auf das Seine bedacht ist",<sup>235</sup> makes him a social outcast. He becomes isolated from the villagers:

"Jeder Mensch ist froh, wenn er nichts mit Großvater zu tun hat. Der Alte lebt wie auf einer Insel."<sup>236</sup>

The ineluctability and predictability of social progress is further emphasised by the symbolic conflict between grandfather and father. As this generation conflict reflects the political confrontation between capitalist individualism and socialist collectivism, the outcome of the struggle between the old (the grandfather) and the new (the father) is never in doubt:

"Er [the grandfather] geht geduckt umher, als ob er alle Welt anspringen möchte, aber die Welt will nichts mehr mit ihm zu tun haben. Er ist wie ein alter Baumstumpf auf dem Wege, dem alle Fuhrwerke ausweichen und den sie umfahren. Es lohnt nicht, den morschen Stumpf zu ernten. Er gibt kein Brennholz her. Die Zeit hat ihn zermüht. Er zerfällt und wird zu Erde."<sup>237</sup>

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234 Strittmatter, Tinko, p.328.

235 Ibid., p.45.

236 Ibid., p.308.

237 Ibid., pp.326-327.

He is an anachronism. Strittmatter makes this clear in an episode where Kraske hears a radio bulletin celebrating the spread of co-operation among the farmers. The old man is as powerless to stop the broadcast with his angry replies as he is to hinder the progress of history. And Kraske's death at the end of the novel is presented as both the culmination of a biological process and a historical necessity:

"Ich sehe Großvaters Hände zum letzten Male. Sie waren stumpf und braun wie Wurzelstümpfe. Jetzt sind sie bleich und grau wie Knochen. Sie werden nicht mehr im Acker wühlen, als ob sie ihn streicheln. Sie werden mich auch nicht mehr schlagen. Sie haben die neue Zeit zurückzerren wollen. Die Zeit schleuderte sie beiseite."<sup>238</sup>

As we have seen, Strittmatter makes Tinko the medium for the confrontation of social ideologies, and uses the naive child-perspective as a device to demonstrate the injustice of private ownership and the moral superiority of collective production. The choice of Tinko as narrator, however, is limited in its application for, while appealing to the reader's emotions, it rules out a critical appraisal of the new order and leads at certain points of the novel to superficiality, sentimentality, and the romanticising of social processes, e.g. adult conflicts are repeated among the children, the capitalist is characterised by cruelty to animals, Russia appears as a "Wunderland" where children can play and study and grandmothers enjoy their leisure, and the tractor is described as an "Eisentier" or "ein goldenes Pferd." While such techniques

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<sup>238</sup> Strittmatter, Tinko, p.360.

may be appropriate to the fairytale,<sup>239</sup> the use of the child-perspective as a means of ideological persuasion is less than convincing. Moreover, in order to comment on the action, the author must abandon the child-perspective, as when he wants to supply motivations for the characters or to describe scenes in which the boy is not present. As Barbara Einhorn<sup>240</sup> remarks, however, the author's didactic purpose is at times achieved only at the expense of credibility and consistency, for the aesthetic unity of the work is thereby disrupted by creating a contradiction between the naive narrative perspective (Tinko) and the omniscient viewpoint of the author.

While Tinko's difficult emancipation from his grandfather is authentically delineated, the choice of Kraske as the central figure, the absence of an appropriate antagonist (Tinko's father is only sketched), and the predictability of the solution create a somewhat unconvincing presentation of the new society. The socialist order is represented only by a handful of minor exemplary characters lacking individual complexity and, as mentioned, the spirit of socialism is expressed through the eyes of the child-hero in terms of a naive, almost simplistic belief in progress. The result is that, not only for Tinko himself, but also for socialism, Kraske's death is presented as the ideal resolution of conflict. Although it must be granted that Strittmatter's introduction of the "Bauernhilfe", a machine pool, and the village quota system into his work as nascent forms of communal production,

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239 Tinko is recommended for readers over thirteen years of age.

240 For a detailed and thoughtful examination of the narrative perspective see: Einhorn, Der Roman in der DDR, pp.176-211. See also: Christa Wolf, "Menschliche Konflikte in unserer Zeit." Neue Deutsche Literatur 3, Heft 7, 1955.

does look towards future developments, namely the collectivisation of the 1950's, the absence of an objective authority to expose the deeper nature of socialism and, above all, to point to problems still to be resolved, creates the impression of a harmonious community, a socialist idyll free of contradictions, which fails to take account of the complexity of social development. The author's affirmation of the new society is unqualified, total happiness is reduced to a question of social organisation alone, and socialism is presented as a utopian solution. The consequence is an over-simplified, schematic presentation of social reality and a loss of historical perspective.

In a period marked by the transition from individual production to institutionalised collectivism, when obedience to official doctrine and compliance with centralised economic planning were political imperatives, literature assumed the function of promoting public acceptance of political goals and economic directives. Tinko, which proclaims the benefits of collectivism and the evils of private ownership, illustrates the role of the agrarian novel in this context as the vehicle for political propaganda. In contrast with bourgeois idealism the didacticism of socialist realism, which is oriented to the development of socialist consciousness in the reader, involves a new presentation of character and distribution of values, in accordance not with the bourgeois vision of individual striving and self-sufficiency but with the goal of socialist collectivism on the basis of communal ownership. Strittmatter, as we have seen, applies moral judgements to economic principles in order to demonstrate not only

the economic unfeasibility but also the depravity and inhumanity of private production. This is achieved by means of the boy Tinko's perspective, whose emotional development symbolises, at the cost of authenticity, the purposeful progress of history, and through the almost primitive manipulation of character illustrated by the author's vilification of the individual producer. Social change is presented mechanically through the generation conflict as an inevitable process independent of individual will.

While Tinko proclaims the necessity of socialist change as a desirable goal, Ole Bienkopp (1963), in which both the truth and the presence of socialism are assumed, turns to an examination not of ends but of means. The conflict now centres not on the superiority of socialism over capitalism, but on a further definition of socialism in relation to its attainment. With the accompanying shift in ideological emphasis the individual hero, in the role of the socialist worker-pioneer, appears once more as the central character in the agrarian novel.

OLE BIENKOPP

For an understanding of Erwin Strittmatter's third agrarian novel Ole Bienkopp, the work for which he is best known, it is necessary to examine briefly the circumstances under which it was written.

In 1959 and 1964 two conferences, termed the "Bitterfeld" conferences after the name of the industrial collective where they convened, were held with the aim of bridging the gap between the artist and the worker in socialist society. Under the motto "Greif zur Feder, Kumpel" workers were encouraged to give literary expression to their experiences in the work-place and authors were urged to take an active part in social development by making themselves familiar with the everyday life of the worker. Several authors followed this call, the most notable being Erik Neutsch, Christa Wolf, Erwin Strittmatter, and Karl-Heinz Jakobs, who made the work-place, whether in the city or on the land, the scene of their novels.

The literature which proceeded from the impulses of the Bitterfeld movement was characterised by a new type of conflict. Following the definitive separation of Germany through the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, and in accordance with the official view of socialism as a relatively consolidated structure,<sup>241</sup> conflicts were no longer to be associated with class struggle but were regarded as contradictions within the socialist system, so-called "nichtantagonistische Widersprüche". In her study of the

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<sup>241</sup> This was reaffirmed expressly by Walter Ulbricht at the Seventh Party Congress of the SED in 1967.

Bitterfeld movement Ingeborg Gerlach remarks on this new role of literature in the socialist state where class antagonisms officially no longer exist:

"Eine neue Art von Konflikten wurde sichtbar:  
Nicht zwischen Klassenfeinden, sondern zwischen  
Menschen, die prinzipiell von der Richtigkeit  
des Sozialismus überzeugt sind, sich aber über  
den besten Weg zu diesem Ziel nicht einig werden  
können."<sup>242</sup>

The effects of this shift in emphasis, in the socialist novel, from the legitimization of ideology to the question of the attainment of generally endorsed goals of increased productivity and efficiency,<sup>243</sup> made themselves visible in a wider perception of the complexity of social reality, above all in a new evaluation of the contribution by the active individual to production and social progress in his everyday life and work. The renewed regard for voluntary labour and working discipline as service to the society and state can be seen as evidence of a revitalisation of the fundamental socialist creed of the workers' state.

An important consequence for art of the Bitterfeld conception was the emancipation from the schematic conflict configurations, contrived solutions and shallow idealisation of socialist society (Tinko) typical of much doctrinaire literature in the Stalinist era, and a questioning of reality through the presentation of a further ideal: the fulfilment of the individual in the work-process. This new appraisal of individuality as the source of productive change is illustrated by Strittmatter in his novel Ole Bienkopp.

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242 Ingeborg Gerlach, Bitterfeld. Arbeiterliteratur und Literatur der Arbeitswelt in der DDR (Kronberg: Scriptor, 1974), p.25.

243 Ibid., pp.20-21.



The significance of this work in the development of the agrarian novel and in its position as the conclusion and culmination of this study, the complexity in structure and content in comparison with previous novels, its popularity<sup>244</sup> and the lively interest its appearance caused in East Germany, necessitate a rather more detailed examination than has been the case hitherto.

In the first part of his novel Strittmatter sets out the distinctive features of the hero's personality and examines the nature of his private conflict as an obstacle to the development of socialist awareness.

For Ole the natural environment is already in his youth a challenge. He dreams of taming swarms of wild bees and of training cranes to follow his commands. Strittmatter makes this attribute - a poetic, naive attachment to nature - the essence of his individuality. The name "Bienkopp", which Ole receives when he walks through the village with a swarm of bees on his head, is a reference to this inventiveness.

His dreams, moreover, are not mere fancy, for the activist hero is attributed with a compulsion to put his ideas to the test:

"Ole war ein Träumer, aber keiner von jenen, die an den Ecken des Lebens sitzen und auf Wunder warten. Er versuchte, seine Träume mit Taten in das Leben zu zwingen."<sup>245</sup>

Pre-war capitalist society, however, restricts his striving, allowing him no scope for his creativity. Ole, finding that the power and influence of the rich landowners, the Baron von Wedelstedt

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244 In 1977 Ole Bienkopp appeared in a nineteenth printing through the Aufbau Press of East Germany. It has been translated into several languages and appeared as German paperback (Fischer Taschenbuch) in 1976.

245 Erwin Strittmatter, Ole Bienkopp (Berlin [DDR]: Aufbau, 1963), p.31.

and the capitalist saw-miller Ramsch bar his plans, turns his back on his father's small holding and becomes a wanderer.

Ole's political development proceeds under the diametrically opposed influences of the communist Anton Dürer and of his grasping wife Anngret.

In his period of social isolation Ole's only friend and mentor is Anton, for whom he distributes political pamphlets. Although they both rebel against the injustice of capitalist society, however, their protests take different forms. Whereas Ole's is the spontaneous rebelliousness born of anarchic individualism, an attempt to make himself independent of those social forces which stand in the way of the fulfilment of his ideals, Anton has learnt that only political commitment and organisation can bring about social change. Nevertheless he does retain some of Anton's teaching, we are shown, and refuses to join the National Socialist Workers' Front. In the motivation of his character's decision for socialism, Ole's war experiences play an important part in that they impel him to action against injustice and inhumanity: he murders a brutal superior officer and later deserts to the Russians.

He encounters a further obstacle to his political development in his infatuation with the fisherman's daughter Anngret which isolates him still more from the reality of class struggle.

In post-war socialist society Ole's actions lose their anarchical quality and his attachment to nature takes on a social dimension. His natural creativity becomes now productive in service to society and state. At the same time the differences between the aims and ideals of husband and wife become critical, for while the ambitious Anngret has retained the acquisitiveness of

the property owner and exploits Ole's talents for her own gain, he is already as a "Neubauer" working for the common good:

"Anngret ist auf das ihre bedacht und hat herrische Anwandlungen. Vielleicht verfolgt sie besondere Ziele mit der Vermehrung ihres Wohlstandes?

Ole ist stark, arbeitsfroh und lebenslustig. Er schöpft aus dem vollen, jedoch an gehäuften Schätzen liegt ihm nichts. Was er hat, sollen auch andere haben."<sup>246</sup>

The decision with which Ole is faced, between his beliefs and Anngret on whom he is sexually dependent, affects therefore not only his private life but has wider social implications. Anngret's illicit relationship with the ruthless class enemy Ramsch, the murderer of the Party secretary Anton Dürr, associates her directly with the reactionary forces in the village and stresses the urgency of Ole's decision. The conflicts between collective and individualist ways of thinking reflect the still transitory nature of socialist society in the early 1950's and demonstrate the need to abolish private production and thereby remove the basis for injustice.

Ole's struggle with death after a brawl with Ramsch is a decisive point in his development, both personally and politically, for it results in his liberation from Anngret and the decision to make it his task to fulfil Anton's dream of an agricultural collective. For the worker-hero who views his own interests in terms of the common good the collective is not merely a personal legacy but also a social duty. It is an attempt to eliminate the social and economic inequalities which have arisen in the village since the land reform and, as such, is a blow to the capitalist forces - foremost Ramsch, the reactionary farmer Serno and Anngret - who, on the foundation of private ownership and by virtue of

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<sup>246</sup> Strittmatter, Ole Bienkopp, p.8.

superior resources, have continued to exert power and influence in the community.

But one set of adversaries is replaced by another, now from Ole's own ranks. On an occasion when the collective needs fertiliser before ploughing can begin Ole's requests are met by an impenetrable maze of laws and statutes. His frustration is all the greater since he realises that he is dealing now not with class enemies but with committed socialists like himself:

"Bienkopp möchte heulen vor Wut, möchte dreinschlagen, aber hier handelt es sich nicht um einen Sägemüller, hier handelt es sich überhaupt nicht um die Reaktion und nicht um Gegner."<sup>247</sup>

Moreover, he is accused of violating Party discipline by establishing a collective on his own initiative ahead of the Party, and, offended, leaves it.

These encounters indicate the nature of what now becomes the major source of conflict: not the opposed social interests of the characters (counter-revolutionary elements within the village) or the illustration of class antagonism in the development of the hero (Anton against Anngret) but disagreement and dispute about the means to reach the common goal of socialism.

The action in the second part of the novel takes place in the years from 1958 to 1960. We learn that Ole has not only been restored to the Party but became a hero when the establishment of agricultural collectives was authorised at the 1952 Party conference.

The conflict centres now on the problems of authority and competence. Although the socialist community allows him scope for the realisation of the dreams of his youth, Ole's inventiveness

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<sup>247</sup> Strittmatter, Ole Bienkopp, p.148.

meets the opposition of a conservative Party machinery. He plans to excavate marl to make acidic fields productive and thereby provide the basis for the officially prescribed increase in stock numbers. When he accordingly points out the danger of a dramatic increase without corresponding fodder production Frieda Simson, the Mayoress, reproaches him with impairing Blumenau's reputation in the productivity statistics. On another occasion he successfully rears ducks on his own initiative but the Party official Kraushaar, on the grounds that this represents a deviation from the official productivity schedule, confiscates the young birds to replace those lost on the provincial poultry farm through his own incompetence. In spite of the machinations of authoritarian and self-interested Party officials the initiative of the worker-pioneer in the attainment of production goals repeatedly proves superior to inflexible economic planning.

The climax of the conflict comes when, against his advice, an officially authorised open stall is erected for newly imported cattle, the promised fodder fails to arrive, and six beasts are lost. Ole is accused of negligence and dismissed from the collective. Deserted by the authorities and realising that there is little chance of obtaining a mechanical excavator, yet determined to prove the practicability of his plan, he sets to work single-handed to dig the valuable marl from the fields, and perishes.

In his new novel Strittmatter, as we have observed, makes his hero an active participant in the action. In contrast with Ochsenkutscher and Tinko where the naive perspective of the child as a passive observer reflected class configuration and social conflict, Ole Bienkopp is concerned with the role of the active worker in historical development. Tinko presented social progress as a mechanical, autonomous process: the issue here is the

relationship between individual freedom and fulfilment, and social determination.

The affinity with the bourgeois novel, suggested by the emphasis on personality and individuality, is strengthened by Strittmatter's construction of the conflict in terms of the antagonism between character and ideology.

Ole thinks and acts not in terms of political categories, ideology or theoretical principles, but according to a personal ideal. In order to win the villagers to his collective he approaches them not with political slogans but with promises calculated to appeal to their idiosyncracies. And the idea of the collective, the author has Ole explain to a reporter, resulted in the first place from personal obligation towards Anton Dürr, and only incidentally from political reflection. Not Party discipline but his own convictions are shown to guide his actions throughout, as Thomas Feitknecht remarks:

"Unter Sozialismus versteht er nicht Ideologie und Parteibuchweisheit, sondern den Versuch, spontan seine eigene Utopie zu verwirklichen."<sup>248</sup>

Thus Strittmatter demonstrates how, under socialism, he finally fulfils his childhood dream of raising ducks in their natural environment.

Strittmatter constructs his hero as the incarnation of exemplary socialist conduct. Ole's productive individuality is complemented by social responsibility. His speech at a Party conference in defence of his controversial collective demonstrates an appreciation of social needs and appraisal of the direction of historical development. Fresh injustices have developed in the village which, he believes, the collective will eliminate:

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<sup>248</sup> Thomas Feitknecht, Die sozialistische Heimat; zum Selbstverständnis neuerer DDR-Romane (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1971), p.55.

"Die ehemalige Bäuerin Anngret Bienkopp fährt am Sonntag in der Kutsche über Land. Die Bäuerin Sophie Bummel muß daheim hocken, weil sie kein Sonntagskleid hat, geschweige eine Kutsche. Altbauer Serno läßt auf seine Rechnung die Kirche anstreichen; Neubauer Bartasch ist nicht fauler als Serno, aber er kann sich keine Latten für einen Vorgartenzaun leisten. Ich habe fort und fort darüber nachgedacht, wie man die Unterschiede ausgleicht. Ich mache einen Versuch."<sup>249</sup>

The hero's reflections here are evidence of his ability to see beyond his own working situation and to assess a social and political necessity from his own observations.

His actions, also, testify repeatedly to his awareness of the needs of the nation, for he uses natural resources to increase the financial means of the collective and so assist the state. The quality of the farmer-hero's peculiar relationship to nature as his working environment becomes clear and takes on its full social significance in his confrontations with a dogmatic Party bureaucracy. In matters of agricultural policy local knowledge, initiative and common sense prove superior to the irrational implementation of official directives in the pursuit of higher productivity.<sup>250</sup> Both on the open-stall question and in the matter of poultry production the incompetence and unscrupulousness of the Party administration

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249 Strittmatter, Ole Bienkopp, p.192.

250 This criticism can be related to the immediate political background, namely to the economic reforms of 1963 to 1967 ("Neues Ökonomisches System der Planung und Leitung") which had the aim of resolving the difficulties of inflexible planning by allowing for greater participation of informed local groups and individual workers in the decision-making process, with the ultimate ideal of a self-regulating economy on the foundation of the plan. Hans-Georg Hölsken relates Strittmatter's satire directly to the Party Secretary Walter Ulbricht's speech at the Sixth Party Congress of the SED. See: Hölsken, Jüngere Romane aus der DDR im Deutschunterricht. Ein Beitrag zur politischen Bildung (Hannover: Niedersächsische Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 1969), p.37 ff.

- in the one case the Mayoress Frieda Simson, in the other the official "expert" in agricultural affairs Kraushaar - who sabotage or obstruct Ole's efforts to carry through rational change, are exposed to bitter satire.

Moreover, while not using it consistently, Strittmatter introduces the leitmotif "Erdraum" to show - if melodramatically and somewhat out of keeping with the provincial limitation of the action - the wider implications of his hero's actions where Ole is unable to see them himself. The author, comparing it with Man's first explorations in space, highlights the significance of his pioneer action in establishing the first collective:

"Die Erde reist durch den Weltenraum. Bienkopp hat ein Stück Weltenraum in die dumpfe Versammlung gerissen."<sup>251</sup>

A variation of this symbol appears at the beginning and end of the novel and again relates Blumenau, the events there, and Bienkopp's initiative to the development of the state:

"Was ist ein Dorf auf dieser Erde? Es kann eine Spore auf der Schale einer faulenden Kartoffel oder ein Pünktchen Rot an der besonnten Seite eines reifenden Apfels sein."<sup>252</sup>

By means of this symbolism Strittmatter makes the progress of society dependent on the actions of each individual in his everyday life and work.

The importance of the hero's death to the argument of the novel and to an analysis of the author's intentions is confirmed by the reaction it provoked in East Germany. Here, while recognising the positive emotional appeal of Ole's martyrdom for

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<sup>251</sup> Strittmatter, Ole Bienkopp, p.193.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., pp.7,428.



the cause of socialism, critics were quick to restate the authority of the Party and the necessity of collective organisation and discipline against the uncompromising claims of the individual. In an endeavour to exonerate the Party of responsibility, Ole's death was attributed to a flaw in his character, namely an anarchic tendency to act alone, and the author reproached with the fact that his hero fails to turn to the Party for assistance.

Helga Herting's comments are typical of such criticism:

"Bienkopp geht ... zugrunde, nicht nur weil er am blinden Dogmatismus einer Frieda Simson scheitert, sondern auch deshalb, weil er Züge von Anarchismus und Spontaneität, die sich vor allem während seiner Entwicklung im Kapitalismus ausgeprägt haben, nicht abgestreift hat, sich vom Kollektiv gelöst hat und den Kampf auf eigene Faust führt."<sup>253</sup>

According to this interpretation the hero's death results from the survival of bourgeois isolationism in his behaviour.

Inge von Wangenheim seems to have ascertained the author's purpose more accurately when she writes:

"Das Schicksal des untergehenden Siegers von Blumenau läßt keinen anderen Schluß zu als diesen: zum Sozialismus auf dem Lande entweder mit Bienkopp oder überhaupt nicht!"<sup>254</sup>

As this critic suggests, Strittmatter seems to interpret his character's death positively as the apotheosis of his selfless toil for socialism. He dies, as he lived, for the state. This is supported by the text.

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253 Helga Herting, Das sozialistische Menschenbild in der Gegenwartsliteratur (Berlin [DDR]: Tribüne, 1966), p.63.

254 Inge von Wangenheim, Die Geschichte und unsere Geschichten. Gedanken eines Schriftstellers. (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1966), p.77. Underscoring indicates italics in the original.

Directly responsible for Bienkopp's death is undoubtedly his own "Eigensinn", an uncompromising compulsion to put his plan to the test:

"Träume ohne Taten sind tauben Blüten gleich ...  
Er darf keine Zeit verlieren."<sup>255</sup>

We have seen that under socialism this attribute lost its individualist, asocial associations and assumed a new socially productive function. As one character remarks, it is "Eigensinn ohne Eigennutz."<sup>256</sup>

His death appears also as the dramatisation of the central conflict between the revolutionary will of the socialist worker and an authoritarian environment. In an interview discussing his book Strittmatter makes this plain:

"Meine Frage war: Wie bringen wir in unserer Gesellschaft den Neuerer, den Vorwärtsdränger, gut unter, so daß wir ihm nicht seinen Tatendrang beschneiden, aber auch so, daß wir ihn nicht nach der anarchistischen Seite ausscheren lassen."<sup>257</sup>

Bienkopp, the author tells us, needs and seeks the support of the administration but does not find it. His diligence and loyalty to socialism assume heroic proportions as he sets to work single-handed to prove the utility of his plan for the collective and reaches his goal at the cost of his life. This melodramatic, unreal scene is full of pathos and sentimentality:

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255 Strittmatter, Ole Bienkopp, p.418.

256 Ibid., p.427.

257 "Schriftsteller an der Basis" (Radio interview with Erwin Strittmatter). Neue Deutsche Literatur 13, Heft 6, 1965, p.69.

"Er muß selber Bagger sein. Er schaufelt und scharrt wie ein Erdgeist, ist voller Zorn; doch geduckt und bedrückt ist er nicht. Er ist wie der Urmensch, der sich das Feuer suchte. Man hat ihn beurlaubt. Beurlauben kann ihn nur, wer ihn tötet."<sup>258</sup>

The novel concludes moreover in the spirit of socialist progress. The scene is set for the realisation of Bienkopp's plan. District Party Secretary Wunschgetreu arrives with an excavator, Märtke, Bienkopp's comrade and lover, remains to continue his work (presumably their child she bears will do the same), and an image of flocks of ducks symbolises the imminent fulfilment of his dreams.

In view of the response Ole Bienkopp elicited, above all in East Germany, it seems appropriate at this stage, before I proceed to a closer examination of its significance in the development of the agrarian novel, to devote some space to a summary of the novel's reception in East and West.

In West Germany Strittmatter's works have aroused only mild interest. Critics have generally dismissed him as a Party-loyal "Heimatsdichter" of less than average talent. Fritz Raddatz brands Ole Bienkopp provocatively "Blut und Boden rosa gefärbt",<sup>259</sup> a comparison which he fails to expound, and Sabine Brandt's judgement is hardly more flattering:

"Über das literarische Niveau eines Niederlausitzer Heimatschriftstellers ist Strittmatter nie hinausgekommen."<sup>260</sup>

Certainly, in his portrayal of western "decadence" and of the class enemy Strittmatter offers no variation to the schematic

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258 Strittmatter, Ole Bienkopp, p.420.

259 Fritz Raddatz, "Blut und Boden rosa gefärbt. Die Diskussion um Strittmatter." Süddeutsche Zeitung No.28, 1964.

260 Sabine Brandt, "Bei Strittmatter. Unmündige und Käuze". Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung No.39, 15/2/64.

presentation by other socialist authors. Ramsch, the English-speaking saw-miller, flees to West Berlin, the "Abendinsel", when he can no longer expand his business in the East, and designs hula-hoops! Serno, the reactionary capitalist landowner, is the stereotype caricature - fat, sly, acquisitive, and pious. Both are distinguished by the attributes typical of the former exploiting class: immorality and brutality.

In East Germany, on the other hand, as I mentioned when discussing the death of the hero, Ole Bienkopp caused a heated debate. The criticism in the press centred on the author's characterisation of the hero and on the presentation of the Party in the work. According to Eduard Zak, Bienkopp, a figure typical of the period of transition between capitalism and socialism, is by nature a lone hero:

"Das Stehen auf sich allein, die Unabhängigkeit seiner Leistung ist ihm - als einer Übergangerscheinung - zur Natur geworden."<sup>261</sup>

For Werner Ilberg he is an "Eigenbrötler, [dem] das Kollektiv fremd [ist],"<sup>262</sup> and Hans-Jürgen Geisthardt describes him as "... der spontan, undiszipliniert Handelnde ... der aus seiner Vergangenheit einen Schuß Anarchismus mit sich herumschleppt."<sup>263</sup> For Geisthardt the author's lack of critical detachment from the hero produces a schematic presentation of historical development dominated by the perspective of the hero, in which the leading role of the Party as the necessary complement to the revolutionary initiative of the individual is missing. In fact, as we have seen,

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261 Eduard Zak, "Held des Übergangs". Sonntag 48, 1963.

262 Werner Ilberg, "Front zwischen Büro und Feld?" Sonntag 1, 1964.

263 Hans-Jürgen Geisthardt, "'Ole Bienkopp'. Roman von Erwin Strittmatter". Neues Deutschland No.29, 29/1/64.

Strittmatter has merely re-evaluated the idea of the Party in terms of personality and individual striving. Ole sees himself as the Party, and indeed best represents its spirit in the novel, as illustrated by his actions which are repeatedly shown to promote the welfare of his state.

Strittmatter's characterisation of his central hero reflects a shift in the ideological function of socialist didacticism. In the transitional era the attainment of essential political goals was the end to which the novel was constructed (Tinko). Ole Bienkopp, also, fulfils the role of assisting in the integration of the individual into the socialist community, but here, in its emphasis on increased productivity and in its reaffirmation of the relationship between the worker, work and society, does so indirectly and on a personal rather than political level. The model worker-hero, whose loyalty and good will are tested and proven, in a socialist variation of the allegory, through private conflict (dependence on Anngret) and encounters with authority (the opposition of a conservative administration), demonstrates the value of individual labour as the main factor in the process of socialist construction. The pioneer, in whom the creativity of the worker and social consciousness (unlike the bourgeois farmer-hero who works for himself and for property the collective farmer works for the common good) are embodied, is now the agent of social progress.<sup>264</sup>

This emphasis on work as incorporating the most important values of socialism is seen by Ingeborg Gerlach as part of a shift from political issues to private life and the attainment of

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264 See: Kühn, Welt und Gestalt des Bauern in der deutschsprachigen Literatur, p.444 ff.

economic goals:

"Sozialismus versteht sich in der nachstalinistischen Ära als Produktivität - und umgekehrt gilt Produktivität als angewandter Sozialismus. Der beruflich Tüchtige wird als potentieller Verbündeter betrachtet; daher soll er für die neue Weltanschauung gewonnen werden. Nicht von ungefähr kehrt in den jüngeren DDR - Romanen die Gestalt des politisch Desinteressierten, nur auf seine Arbeit konzentrierten, ständig wieder."<sup>265</sup>

In Ole Bienkopp the conflict of the worker-hero with authority is not confined to matters of ideology and economic policy but is extended by Strittmatter even to questions of political responsibility. The distinction for the worker between personal commitment and political involvement is illustrated in an episode where Wunschgetreu, the district Party secretary, approaches Bienkopp to assist in a propaganda campaign:

"Das wollte Bienkopp nicht. Seine Genossenschaft stand noch vor dem Berge. 'Reden ist nicht meine Sache. Ich bin fürs Tun! ... Ein Parteauftrag und der Genosse, der ihn ausführen soll, müßten ein bißchen zusammenpassen.'<sup>266</sup>

On the concept of the Party centres not only this incident but the nature of the relationship between the individual and authority under socialism.

For Ole the Party is a totality, a democratic subsumption of individuality. His conception is in keeping with his personal vision of socialism as the right to employ his talents for the common cause:

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<sup>265</sup> Gerlach, Bitterfeld, p.113.

<sup>266</sup> Strittmatter, Ole Bienkopp, p.245.

"Für ihn war die Partei eine Summe. Eine Summe von Klugheit, eine Summe von Mut, eine Summe von Taten, eine Summe Gedachtes, eine Summe Erkanntes, eine Summe von Sehnsucht, eine Summe von Liebe für alles, was unterdrückt ist, eine Summe von Menschen, Lebenden und Gestorbenen."267

Whereas for Frieda Simson the Party is an ideological abstraction, and for Wunschgetreu an anonymous infallible authority, it is for Bienkopp an organism of which he feels a part:

"Ist die Partei ein selbstgefälliger Gott?  
Auch ich bin die Partei!"268

Wunschgetreu, as the name suggests, has retained from the Stalinist era the habit of executing blindly the orders of his superiors. In contrast to Ole he regards the Party as an authoritarian political agency of imposition and control:

"Was vorwärts und was rückwärts ist, bestimmt,  
dächt ich, noch immer die Partei"269 ... Was  
gestern falsch war, kann morgen richtig sein."270

Although experience has taught him to use his own judgement in interpreting official directives, his experiences under the fascist regime have made him fearful of his reputation in the Party. Only when his faith in his own superiors is shaken by their failure to deliver the fodder promised for extra stock does he commit himself to Ole's cause by securing an excavator.

For Frieda Simson, the Mayoress of Blumenau, the Party is an abstraction. Her view of the Party is narrow, inflexible, and reflects her own self-righteousness:

"Die Partei ist Frieda Simson. Andere Genossen haben größere oder kleinere Abweichungen. Was der Mustermaßstab, der in Paris in einem Keller aufgebracht wird, für die Geometer der Welt ist, das ist Frieda Simson für die Partei in Blumenau."271

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267 Strittmatter, Ole Bienkopp, p.244.

268 Ibid., p.194.

269 Loc cit.

270 Ibid., p.231.

271 Ibid., p.141.

As this view allows little room for the revolutionary initiative of the individual, she interprets Ole's non-conformism as violation of Party discipline and attempts to sabotage his plans (as in the open-stall affair).

The emancipation of the woman through socialism<sup>272</sup> is illustrated in Ole Bienkopp on the one hand by the political activity of the Mayoress Frieda Simson, and on the other by the unusual union between the young poultry assistant and Bienkopp, her elder by more than thirty years.

While the motivation for Wunschgetreu's actions is well analysed from his past experiences, Frieda Simson's function in the work as the incarnation of the bureaucratic mentality and so as Bienkopp's chief antagonist does not always follow convincingly from her characterisation. The author turns her into a caricature by giving her an exaggerated love of slogans and a military manner. This is a justifiable means of criticism. Moreover, as in the other Party representatives, blind obedience to authority is shown to result logically from ambition (she seeks promotion for her vigilance on behalf of the Party). However, while Ole and Märtke's unconventional relationship emphasises, albeit rather obviously and by means of well-worn clichés, the enlightenment of socialism, it sets off Frieda's puritanical morality and provokes her petty jealousy and frustrated womanhood (she is spurned by Ole and in revenge sets out to destroy his relationship with Märtke). The

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272 See: Patricia Herminhouse, "Wunschbild, Vorbild oder Porträt? Zur Darstellung der Frau im Roman der DDR", in: Peter Hohendahl and Patricia Herminhouse (eds.), Literatur und Literaturtheorie in der DDR (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1976), pp.281-334, especially pp.309-311.



association in Frieda of prudery and vindictiveness with authoritarianism and dogmatism fails to illuminate objectively the workings of the bureaucratic mind,<sup>273</sup> and instead reduces the source of her antagonism to purely personal motives, leaving the worker-hero Bienkopp without a convincing antagonist and weakening the central conflict.

We have observed how Strittmatter constructs in Ole Bienkopp the exemplary socialist personality. In the farmer-hero he makes the individual's creative relationship to his work-environment, socialist labour, service, heroic perseverance against the incomprehension and opposition of unscrupulous political authorities and with disregard for the force of ideology and dogma, and ultimately self-sacrifice, the sources of productive change. Strittmatter illustrates the progress of socialism (the creation of the first collective, the rational and productive implementation of economic change, the imaginative utilisation of natural resources) in everyday life as the product of individual initiative. This pattern of anticipation and acknowledgement created by the plot suggests a freedom from political power which is reinforced by the provincial limitation<sup>274</sup> of the action.

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273 The nature of bureaucracy as an authority alienating the worker from the decision-maker is more convincingly illustrated through the development of the minor character Kraushaar, a tractor-driver who degenerates, in administration, into a passive tool of his superiors.

274 Hans Dietrich Sander has observed what he terms a general "Trend zur Ersatzwelt" and "antäische Kehre zur Beschreibung einer Provinz" in East German literature since the 1960's. This he interprets, on the one hand, as an emancipation from the stylised presentation of social reality in the era of socialist construction, on the other as an escape from the harsh realities of political life. (Hans Dietrich Sander, Geschichte der Schönen Literatur in der DDR: ein Grundriß (Freiburg: Rombach, 1972), pp.324, 332.

With the exception of isolated minor episodes the background remains local and the conflict peripheral. As Heinz Kersten<sup>275</sup> points out, Strittmatter neither challenges the Party leadership nor does he doubt the wisdom of the SED's agrarian policy. The overall direction of socialist change is never questioned. Rather, the author's criticism is levelled at the lower ranks of administration, at the bureaucratic chain of command - Simson, Kraushaar and Wunschgetreu - who claim to act in the Party's interests while in fact misusing the powers with which they are entrusted.

The possible confrontation between the individual and the regime thus never eventuates. Instead, the object of the worker's striving, the socialist state or "Partei", appears as an indefinite collective ideal, a vague notion of a greater good to which he finally willingly sacrifices his life. The exact relationship between individual labour and political recognition is not explained, for we never learn how Bienkopp's actions assume national relevance (except by superficial and inappropriate symbolism). In the novel the actual Party leadership remains distant and uninvolved. And the sovereignty of the individual is reinforced by the absence of a convincing antagonist.

Having examined its content at some length, it is now possible, bearing in mind obvious differences in principles, ideals and perspective, to establish in Strittmatter's novel striking similarities in respect to conflict, values and didactic intention, with the bourgeois agrarian novel.

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275 See: Heinz Kersten, "Strittmatter's 'Ole Bienkopp' - ein politischer Roman". Alternative 35, April 1964.

The bourgeois agrarian novel, with its intrinsic interest in provincial life, and akin to the "Bildungsroman" with its emphasis on private rather than public or political values, became, in the course of the nineteenth century, the vehicle for the resentment and false idealism of those displaced sections of the traditional middle classes who felt themselves to be the victims of developing capitalism. As the advance of industrialisation led to the substitution of capitalist for feudal or patriarchal principles of social interchange, the sharpening of economic competition, and class antagonism, the agrarian novel assumed an increasingly conservative, and soon outright reactionary character arising from the will to ignore historical developments, and to return to a past built on traditional values and ideals. Toil and endurance, in accordance with middle-class assumptions and expectations, were made notions of moral, personal worth, and the modern age, with its materialist values, artificially excluded in the vision of the self-sufficiency and order of the farming life. The insignificant individual's struggle for fulfilment against social forces beyond his control was invested with symbolic value and labour romanticised as the repository of immutable values. Under the influence of the strong national sentiment which developed at the end of the century this middle-class ideology was moulded into a myth of German superiority, and under National Socialism, as we have observed, became a tool of racial propaganda.

As in the case of Wilhelmine and fascist nationalism, the political significance of Strittmatter's novel must be examined in its historical situation, namely in the context of the aims, assumptions, and values of the East German government.

While collectivisation was intensified through political and economic pressure at the end of the 1950's and reached its peak in the spring of 1960, swelling the numbers of fugitives from the Republic,<sup>276</sup> Strittmatter in his novel transfers the source of historical change into the village.<sup>277</sup> For a population, then, which had only recently experienced forced collectivisation, the author reverses the mechanism of social development.<sup>278</sup> Imposed change appears here as the product of individual will, controlled planning as the dream of the worker who sees his own interests as those of the state. The framework of political control is ignored throughout. Against the actual impotence of the individual as the victim of authority Strittmatter sets the exaggerated self-assertion of the activist worker-hero, enforced conformity is presented as loyalty and endurance, and political control shown to be merely a reflection and confirmation of the popular will.<sup>279</sup> In the socialist myth of collectivisation Bienkopp, the politically uninterested worker, becomes the symbol of historical progress and the incarnation of the socialist morality: free toil, willing

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276 "Die Zwangskollektivierung der Landwirtschaft im Frühjahr 1960 und die erneut verstärkt betriebene Sozialisierung der privaten Industrie -, Handels- und Handwerksbetriebe ließen 1960 die Flüchtlingszahlen wieder steigen. Diese Fluchtbewegung erreichte mit 47433 Flüchtlinge im August 1961 ihren zweiten Höhepunkt, der weitgehend durch Gerüchte über die bevorstehenden Sperrmaßnahmen in Berlin verursacht war." (DDR Handbuch, p.313)

277 It hardly needs to be stated that there is mention of political coercion neither in Strittmatter's novel nor in East German criticism.

278 The way in which this psychological process is set in motion is explained by Bernhard Greiner. However, this critic seems to over-estimate the critical message of the novel for the reader. (Bernhard Greiner, Von der Allegorie zur Idylle; die Literatur der Arbeitswelt in der DDR [Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer, 1974], p.150)

279 For a startlingly different view of the path to collectivisation see Jurij Brezan's short story "Der Geburtstag" where the author describes the brutal attempts to convert an old farmer, and exposes the discrepancy between the end and the means in the attainment of political objectives. (Jurij Brezan, "Der Geburtstag". Sinn und Form 26, Heft 5, 1974.)

endurance, social conscience and, ultimately, martyrdom for the cause. The reader is led to believe that it was not the Party but simply the individual farmer, free from state bonds or ties, in the true spirit of socialism yet at odds with official ideology, who led the state on the path to socialism.

Like the bourgeois agrarian novelist, then, Strittmatter sets out to establish values, rather than state facts.

While Tinko was a defence of socialist ideology and aimed to teach compliance and obedience, the worker-hero in Ole Bienkopp espouses a further set of social ideals: trust and personal commitment. The goal of ideological indoctrination is achieved here through the vision of that good will and willing service in selfless labour which can be manipulated to political ends. The farmer Bienkopp is, like Jörn Uhl or his proletarian counterparts in Ochsenkutscher, the lackey of authority. His behaviour reflects the same attitude of conformism, subordination, and local patriotism as in the bourgeois "Volk"-hero who similarly saw the interests of the state as his own - the socialist farmer Bienkopp sacrifices himself for the collective and state as does the bourgeois farmer for his property as a moral principle (the Büttnerbauer) and for the nation (the "Volk"-hero Jörn Uhl).

In simple language, then, the author's message to the reader is the same: to work hard and well, and to trust in authority. Not only does Strittmatter reaffirm in Ole Bienkopp the fiction of the workers' state but he provides ideological reassurance for the average citizen through the suggestion of freedom in labour from political control.

In its falsification of social reality Strittmatter's image of the socialist state in Ole Bienkopp can be compared with Frenssen's portrayal of Wilhelmine Germany. Here the similarities between bourgeois nationalist ideology and socialist morality become apparent. As Frenssen and later "völkisch" authors made industrial, capitalist Germany the creation of traditional farming values, so Strittmatter's idealisation of the East German state as the product of personality, simple toil and patriotic sentiment, in its absolute glorification of the socialist worker in his everyday life, illustrates again a combination of the idyllic and the heroic, and involves a similar escape from reality and loss of historical relevance.

## CONCLUSION

The starting-point of this study was the Christian novels of Jeremias Gotthelf. The life of the farmer was here constructed to represent the human condition and, in keeping with his Christian didacticism, the author made no distinction between salvation and material success. The affirmation, in the "Uli" novels, of a practical morality based on Christian standards and beliefs, was set in the context of an idealised, divinely ordered society in which the goals of property and social advancement were achieved through Christian education, toil and thrift. However, with the increasing politicisation and secularisation of both public and private life and the accompanying erosion of religion and tradition, Gotthelf, in his later novels, turned from the portrayal of character development to a contrast of the Christian order which he saw exemplified in the stable, pious and industrious existence of the Bernese farmer, with the worldly order imposed by the centralised, liberal-democratic constitutional state.

The conservatism of Gotthelf's later novels, founded on Christian convictions, became a widely-shared sentiment in opposition to the rapid transformation of Germany by industrialisation. The regionalism of "Heimatkunst" was a reaction against the forms of the modern state: the breakdown of traditional patterns and beliefs, the advance of capitalism with the replacement of the estate system based on privilege by class fronts resting on economic power, the structural transformation of an agrarian into an industrial society, and the crisis of German agriculture in competition with overseas production.

While arguments asserting the special interests of agriculture and claiming the value of the farmer as a human type became components of a nationalist conservatism which conformed most closely to middle-class sympathies and assumptions, there grew up out of the Marxist interpretation of history the view of the peasant as a member of an economically doomed class characterised by petty property ownership, socially reactionary and politically uncommitted. On the one hand socialist theorists saw him as a force of middle-class reaction, on the other, with a view to his proletarianisation, as a potential ally of the worker.

The agrarian and the national perspectives of conservative ideology were illustrated respectively by the authors Wilhelm von Polenz and Gustav Frenssen.

In Der Blütnerbauer Polenz made the countryside the setting for the conflict between old and new. While he made the farmer the repository of traditional values amidst radical change, the author saw the dangers of sentimental attachment to the land in an age demanding adaptation to modern rational production and gave a realistic analysis of the causes of class antagonism on the land. Like Gotthelf, the conservative Polenz rejected a political solution to social questions and instead saw the problem of the relationship between the labouring and propertied classes in terms of the common interests of all those involved in the tilling of the soil. He envisaged an ethically organised society united by the powers of tradition and property, founded on common labour and attachment to the soil, and led by a socially responsible paternalistic aristocracy, as the alternative to exploitation and the existence of a separate, potentially revolutionary proletariat. In contrast



with Polenz's realism, Rosegger's romanticisation of the farmer in his sentimental rural idylls, his emotional anti-capitalism, and the associations of harmony and autarchy in the unproblematic agrarian community demonstrated the affinity between agrarian ideology and middle-class ideals of a social formation resting neither on force, class relationships, nor economic competition.

In Jörn Uhl, on the other hand, as the development from the farmer to the engineer illustrated, the author was concerned not with class or occupation but with a philosophy of life which he related to the individual's role in the state. The attachment, by Frenssen, of national characteristics to the farmer as a "völkisch" personality in accordance with conventional values of conformity and achievement, made way, however, in the works of Hermann Burte and Hermann Löns, for an anti-bourgeois, heroic vision of the farmer. The emphasis on a communal, supra-individual ethos distinguished their works from Frenssen's bourgeois national idealism. The addition of the racial component to the myth of the soil marked the radicalisation of agrarian ideology and the transition from Wilhelmine to racial nationalism, and paved the way for the National Socialist creed of "Blut und Boden": the mystical attachment of the "Volk" to the native soil.

The appeal of "Völkische Ideologie" in the Weimar Republic was linked with economic crises and the accentuation of class distinctions, a widespread dissatisfaction with the present and readiness for radical solutions, and the romantic social conservatism of the middle classes. The combination of anti-capitalism, respect for private property, racial theory and military ambitions, on which the National Socialist agrarian programme was based, took account of these sentiments in the mystical importance it attached to the farmer in the racial "Volksgemeinschaft". In the fascist

agrarian novel the countryside was less a contrast world than the setting for the illustration of racial principles, and the farmer became the sire and archetype of the new "Volk".

While the romantic anti-capitalism and anti-modern polemic of Karl Heinrich Waggerl's peasant idylls conformed to petit-bourgeois sentiment and assumptions, Friedrich Giese's myths of racial decline and renewal demonstrated the political relevance of "Blut und Boden" in the context of National Socialist ideology and practice. Not only did the construction of the heroic "Volk" figure contribute to the organisation of the individual for the purposes of the state, but the exclusion of the modern world through the mystical unity of race and landscape and the substitution of racial identity for social position were in keeping with the determination of the National Socialists to reconstruct society through the replacement of class conflict by class collaboration in the national interest.

The anti-fascist literature of Adam Scharrer presented a new set of values and ideals, in accordance not with middle-class standards of individual conduct and personality but with the creed of proletarian revolutionary collectivism. The "völkisch" fiction of class harmony was replaced here by the affirmation of class struggle in the interests of the working classes. Whereas, for the bourgeois writer, it was a sign of moral worth and a mark of achievement, private property was seen from the proletarian perspective as the source of social injustice and exploitation, and the foundation of the unequal distribution of power and wealth in the state. Scharrer analysed National Socialism in terms of class struggle as the crisis of capitalism and exposed the contradictions

between anti-capitalist propaganda and pro-capitalist practice.

Ochsenkutscher introduced the agrarian novel in the context of the socialist DDR. While belonging to the tradition of anti-fascist literature, Erwin Strittmatter's first novel was not an appeal for political commitment and revolutionary action but, in its means of social criticism and in the emphasis on character and episode which demonstrated the falsity of the bourgeois "Bildungsideal", reflected the changed function of the writer. This work added an important dimension to the presentation of class struggle. The province was here an anti-idyll where the author established the relationship in the rural proletariat between class situation, work alienation, political ignorance and subordination to authority.

Set against the historical background of the transition from private to collective production, Tinko illustrated the new role of the socialist agrarian novel, not as protest (Scharrer) or explanation (Ochsenkutscher), but as the vehicle for political instruction through the affirmation of socialist ideology. The novel was structured to reflect the conflict of social philosophies and to demonstrate the moral and economic superiority of collective effort over private ownership. Communal production was associated with enlightenment, humanity, technological progress and so with historical necessity; private ownership with prejudice, inhumanity, and inefficiency. Work in the social context of capitalism was shown to be the exploitation of human labour; work under socialism the abolition of oppression through mechanisation.

It was on the role of the individual worker in socialism that Strittmatter concentrated in his collectivisation novel Ole Bienkopp. This work, which reflected the influence of the Bitterfeld

emphasis on participation and productivity, recognised the existence of an established socialist society by substituting, as the major source of conflict, dispute over the means to a better socialism for class struggle. Strittmatter set the hero's personal idealism in opposition to institutionalised socialism, and affirmed the historical role of the socialist personality in the initiation of social change and in the attainment of economic goals through the implementation of rational improvements. In his socialist "Volk"-hero who overcame personal and social obstacles for the cause of socialism, the author constructed a pattern of behaviour which showed a close affinity with that of the bourgeois hero. Local patriotism, freedom from control in voluntary labour and endurance, and willing conformity to accepted ideals: these associations in Strittmatter's novel represented an idealisation of DDR life similar to the bourgeois distortion of the modern industrial German state, especially in view of the recently completed forced collectivisation. Although recent DDR literature, the latest works of Strittmatter included, is increasingly characterised by a recognition of the everyday and private, of the normal and even banal, the heroic socialist morality presented in Ole Bienkopp has lost none of its ideological validity, emotional appeal, and political application in a state which claims to belong to and represent the workers.

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